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ARTES SCIENTIA VERITAS

# IDOLS OF THE FRENCH STAGE.

BY  
H. SUTHERLAND EDWARDS.

*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.

*SECOND EDITION.*

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## ERRATA.

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Page 11, line 24, *for* "vous" *read* "voudrais "  
" 35, " 9, *for* "condemner" *read* "condamner "  
" 87, " 19, *for* "la" *read* "le "  
" 108, " 5, *for* "noins" *read* "moins "  
" 161, " 5, *for* "abbés" *read* "abbés "  
" 204, " 4, *for* "cete" *read* "cette "  
" 208, " 15, *for* "Ju'" *read* "Qu' "  
" 225, " 5, *for* "on" *read* "un "



# IDOLS OF THE FRENCH STAGE.



## THE WIFE OF MOLIÈRE.



### CHAPTER I.

THE greatest of French dramatists, who must also be considered the greatest of all comedy writers, began life as a law-student, and, before joining a wandering company, qualified himself for practice at the bar. The story of his adventures as a strolling player, more or less faithfully chronicled, with all the variations allowable in a case where the chronicler is avowedly treating his subject in the spirit of a novelist, is to be found in the *Roman Comique* of Scarron. It has at least been discovered

by modern critics that one of the leading personages in the burlesque narrative is Madeleine Béjard, elder sister of the charming but faithless Armande Béjard, known to everyone as Molière's wife; and Madeleine was herself on the best terms with Molière during the period of his artistic vagrancy.

There is scarcely one of Molière's actresses to whom some interesting story does not attach; and these are all fully set forth in the rambling but eminently readable history of the French stage, published early in the eighteenth century, by the brothers Parfait. A few words may be said about several of these before the introduction of the celebrated Armande Béjard, who owed her fame less to her talent than to her having been the wife of the great comic dramatist.

One of the most interesting members of the famous company was Mdlle. du Parc, to whom belongs the unique honour of having been passionately beloved by the three greatest dramatists of France, Corneille, Molière and Racine, besides the incomparable fabulist, or "fable-tree" as the French significantly call him, La Fontaine. Having, as regards the three dramatists, to choose, like Doña

Sol in Victor Hugo's *Hernani*, between an old lover, a middle-aged lover, and a young lover, she was wilful enough to select the last; a preference which left Molière silent, but which provoked from Corneille a complaint in verse so fine that, after reading it, one forgives the lady for having by her heartless conduct called forth such lines.

Mdlle. du Parc had, probably by reason of her personal distinction, gained the name of "Marquise;" and it is by this appellation that the grand old dramatic poet addresses her:—

"Marquise, si mon visage  
A quelques traits un peu vieux,  
Souvenez-vous qu'à mon âge  
Vous ne vaudrez guère mieux.

"Le temps aux plus belles choses  
Aime à faire cet affront :  
Il saura faner vos roses  
Comme il a ridé mon front.

"Le même cours des planètes  
Règle nos jours et nos nuits :  
On me vit ce que vous êtes,  
Vous serez ce que je suis.

"Cependant j'ai quelques charmes  
Qui sont assez éclatants,  
Pour n'avoir pas trop d'alarmes  
De ces ravages du temps.

“ Vous en avez qu'on adore ;  
Mais ceux que vous méprisez  
Pourraient bien durer encore  
Quand ceux-là seront usés.

“ Ils pourront sauver la gloire  
Des yeux qui nous semblent doux,  
Et dans mille ans faire croire  
Ce qu'il me plaira de vous.

“ Chez cette race nouvelle  
Où j'aurai quelque crédit,  
Vous ne passerez pour belle  
Qu'autant que je l'aurai dit.”

Corneille to the last was young in heart. But he must have been sadly wanting in tact to have sought to please a young and capricious beauty by telling her that her charms would not last for ever, and that she would some day be as old as he was. One may even go so far as to suspect that she cared but little what people would think of her beauty a thousand years afterwards; and it might even have occurred to her that, by proclaiming in such tender accents the love with which she had inspired him, Corneille had already said enough on the subject of her beauty to set her right with posterity. Probably, however, the old poet had made his last attack, and been definitely repulsed before turning to verse—more

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for his own solace than with the view of moving the obdurate lady.

Love inspires, together with much that is noble, much that is not; and Corneille, in endeavouring to persuade Mdle. du Parc to pass from Molière's company to his own, had pointed out to her that the troop of his friend Molière "was very inferior in tragedy, so that she would always be sacrificed, since she excelled above all in the tragic style."

Racine made use of the same arguments as Corneille, and, more probably by his personal influence than by any reasoning process, succeeded in taking away his mistress from Molière's company, in order to attach her to the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Racine had previously played tricks of this kind on Molière, but had always been forgiven. This time, however, his treachery was not overlooked, and Racine, who had received from Molière numerous benefits, was no longer admitted to his house. The rupture was complete. A year after this discreditable incident, Mdle. du Parc died. Her best creations were the Andromaque of Racine, and the Arsinoë of Molière.

A less celebrated actress in Molière's company was Mdle. Beaupré, who is chiefly famous by a duel which she fought with another actress named Catherine des Urlies, whom she wounded in the neck. She is known also as the niece of an actress of the same name who uttered some instructive words on the subject of Corneille as a dramatist. "M. de Corneille," she said, "has done the greatest harm to the dramatic profession. Before his time, we had very good pieces, which were written for us in a night for three crowns. People were accustomed to them, all went well, and we gained plenty of money. Now, the public has become difficult to please; M. de Corneille charges large sums for his plays, and we earn scarcely anything." Mdle. Beaupré's best part seems to have been that of the Countess d'Escarbagnac.

Abandoned by her parents on the steps of a church, at the age of ten, and adopted by a kind-hearted washerwoman who picked her up, Mdle. Beauval joined, while still a young girl, a travelling company, in which, after refusing an offer of marriage from the manager, whose tyranny she feared, she chose her husband in the person of the

candle-snuffer, who, she thought, would be humble and obedient.

There was much difficulty in getting the ceremony performed, for the manager, furious at being set aside for a miserable snuffer of candles, contrived to obtain from the Archbishop of Lyons, where the company was performing, an order forbidding the clergy of his diocese to unite the two young people. In this difficulty Mdlle. Beauval went to the parish church, and concealed her appointed husband beneath the pulpit from which the Curé was holding forth. As soon as the sermon was at an end, she called the candle-snuffer from his hiding-place, and declared aloud that she accepted him as her lawful spouse. He made a like declaration; and in presence of wishes so solemnly expressed, the Curé felt bound to consecrate their union. About a year afterwards Molière happened to see Mdlle. Beauval, and obtained a royal order appointing her to his theatre. She appeared at Chambord, but was unfortunate enough not to please the King, who thereupon told Molière to give the part of Nicole in the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* to some other actress.

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Molière, who thought the part of the servant girl suited Mdlle. Beauval perfectly, had to devise some plan for evading His Majesty's command. He represented, say the brothers Parfait, to the King that, having such a few days before him, he should not have time to teach the part to another actress. He then rewrote it, and adapted it in such a marvellous style to the physiognomy of the actress that, to be admirable in the character, she had only to remain natural. This she did; and so well did she play the part that Louis XIV., abandoning his prejudice, told Molière that she must be received into the company. From that time Molière wrote all his servant-girl parts for Mdlle. Beauval.

She is said to have possessed a sharp voice, which was the indication of her character. She was violent, sour-tempered, easily provoked, in fact insupportable. She had enough natural wit, but no education. She scarcely knew her letters, and could read no writing but that of her husband, who copied out her parts and taught them to her.

As for Beauval, he was the incarnation of



patience, and loved his wife sincerely. From candle-snuffer he had been promoted to the rank of actor, and became, thanks to Molière's tuition, a performer of merit, so that he had not his equal in the part of Thomas Diafoirus.

A model of punctuality and perseverance, Mdlle. Beauval, during her thirty years' engagement, never once took a holiday. She only absented herself when she was about to be confined. But this happened often, for she had twenty-four children. She retired from the stage in 1704, and was then employed for many years to organise the famous performances given by the Duchess du Maine at Sceaux.

To speak now of Mdlle. Molière, or Mme. Molière as she would in the present day be called. She was the sister of that Madeleine Béjard who was a leading member of the wandering company in which Molière commenced his theatrical life. Armande was several years younger than Madeleine, and she was by all accounts very charming. No painted portrait of Molière's wife has come down to posterity; but we have a picture of her, drawn by Molière's own hand, in the following

well-known scene from the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* :—

*Covielle.*

Premièrement elle a les yeux petits.

*Cléonte.*

Cela est vrai, elle a les yeux petits; mais elle les a pleins de feu, les plus brillants, les plus perçants du monde, les plus touchants qu'on puisse voir.

*Covielle.*

Elle a la bouche grande.

*Cléonte.*

Oui, mais on y voit des grâces qu'on ne voit point aux autres bouches; et cette bouche, en la voyant, inspire des désirs; elle est la plus attrayante, la plus amoureuse du monde.

*Covielle.*

Pour sa taille, elle n'est pas grande.

*Cléonte.*

Non, mais elle est aisée et bien prise.

*Covielle.*

Elle affecte une nonchalance dans sa parler et dans ses actions.

*Cléonte.*

Il est vrai: mais elle a grâce à tout cela; et ses manières sont engageantes, ont je ne sais quel charme à s'insinuer dans les cœurs.

*The Wife of Molière.*

I I

*Covielle.*

Pour de l'esprit—

*Cléonte.*

Oh ! elle en a, Covielle, du plus fin, du plus délicat.

*Covielle.*

Sa conversation—

*Cléonte.*

Sa conversation est charmante.

*Covielle.*

Elle est toujours sérieuse.

*Cléonte.*

Veux-tu de ces enjouements épanouis, de ces joies toujours ouvertes ? Et vois-tu rien de plus impertinent que ces femmes qui rient à tout propos ?

*Covielle.*

Mais enfin elle est capricieuse que personne du monde.

*Cléonte.*

Oui, elle est capricieuse, j'en demeure d'accord ; mais tout sied bien aux belles, on souffre tout des belles.

*Covielle.*

Puisque cela va comme cela, je vois bien que vous avez envie de l'aimer toujours.

*Cléonte.*

Moi ? j'aimerais mieux mourir ; et je vous la hâir autant que je l'ai aimée.

Such is the portrait traced by Molière of the fascinating Armande Béjard after he had been married to her eight years.

Always deceived as a husband, while fascinated as a lover, Molière, says one of his biographers, time after time, despite all his resolutions, returns to this woman, whom he loves with a love incurable. "On each page of his work one finds her re-appearing. In the *Misanthrope* as well as in the *École des Femmes*, it is she, always she. The comedy of Molière, that irresistible comedy, is indeed the painful drama of his private life. A victim to the fatality of genius, he produces our laughter with his own tears. It is himself that he is representing, and it is his own passion which he sacrifices to the bravos of the crowd. But how heartrending is that irony of his! Beneath that withering wit, those bursts of convulsive laughter, one distinguishes a heavy sob. Great and unhappy Molière! There is not one of his own miseries, his own misfortunes, which escapes his analysis and his sarcasm. Always ill, always dying, he never ceases to rail at the physicians, and with his last breath hurls at them a part-

ing malediction. Himself a sublime cuckold, he makes betrayed husbands the sport of his endless ridicule."

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## CHAPTER II.

ALL Molière's contemporaries seemed to have looked upon Armande Béjard with the eyes of Molière himself. She had a very pretty voice, we read in the *Histoire du Théâtre Français* by the brothers Parfait, "and sang with much taste in French and Italian. No one knew better than she how to show off the beauty of her face by the arrangement of her hair, or of her figure by the fashion of her costume. On the stage she acted her part with great judgment, and her by-play was as remarkable as her spoken words. She was indeed almost as eloquent when listening as when speaking. In such trifles as adjusting her ribbons or playing with her rings she introduced touches of satire, and threw ridicule upon the sort of women she was representing."

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An actress of Molière's company, Mdle. Poisson, gives the following account of Armande Béjard in her "Letter on the Life and Works of Molière, and the Comedians of his Time," published in the *Mercure*, May 1740:—"She was of middle height, with an engaging air, but very little eyes and a very large mouth. She did everything, however slight, with grace, and her dress was remarkable, though opposed to the fashion of the time."

Armande Béjard's distinctive feature seems to have been originality; and to this she is said to have owed the seductive charm to which even those who knew how heartless she was could not but succumb. Armande Grésinde-Claire-Elizabeth Béjard was born in 1645, the very year in which Molière, or Poquelin, to give him his true name, abandoned the law courts for the stage. Her sister Madeleine took charge of her from the first, and she grew up beneath Molière's admiring eyes. At the age of twelve Armande is already accused of having been as remarkable for her "feline caresses" as for her "virginal graces." Madeleine was sometimes severe with the child, who, in these cases found a sure protection in Molière, bent on

spoiling her from the first. Doubtless she was one of the children to whom, as afterwards to his housekeeper, Molière loved to read his plays.

Gradually Armande accustomed herself to count upon the venerable friend—as Molière must have seemed to her—for everything she wanted. Prematurely a woman, coquettish while still a child, her gratitude manifested itself in a thousand marks of affection. Molière could not resist these demonstrations, whose significance he probably mistook. But whether he believed or not that Armande loved him, he was sure that he on his side loved Armande. Hitherto Molière had been attached to a well-known member of his company, Mdle. de la Brie, who, “as soon as she became aware of Molière’s design, did all she could to prevent it.” Nothing seemed to her more cruel than to give up her lover to a little creature whom with reason she felt to be inferior in merit to herself. She testified her impatience to Molière, and by her reproaches made him at least hesitate. For he was always very considerate towards her, and treated her with all possible respect. Madeleine, moreover,

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did her best to prevent Molière from forming with her younger sister a union which could scarcely turn out well.

The great comic dramatist, whether aware or not of his infatuation, was in any case infatuated; and on 20th February 1662, at the age of forty, he became the husband of Armande Béjard, who was just seventeen.

The future Célimène had already appeared on the stage, and her success had been as great in the tragic as in the comic style. Still greater, however, had been the success of her beauty.

The year before her marriage, at a *fête* given by Fouquet to Louis XIV., she appeared, in the midst of twenty fountains, as a naiad, and in that character spoke the prologue of the entertainment. Armande Béjard had to come out of a shell; and the graceful apparition charmed, among others, La Fontaine.

Here are a few of the numerous verses which the incident inspired:—

“Peut-on voir nymphe plus gentille  
Qu'était Béjard l'autre jour?  
Lorsqu'on vit s'ouvrir sa coquille,



Tout le monde disait à l'entour,  
Lorsqu'on vit s'ouvrir sa coquille,  
Voici la mère d'Amour."

Had he been a little more prudent, a little less blind, Molière would have withdrawn his wife from the temptations of the stage. But, unfortunately, he was proud of her talent, and wrote parts for her, with the express view of showing her off to the greatest advantage. Molière's marriage was unhappy from the beginning. First he had to support the reproaches of Madeleine and of Mdlle. de la Brie. Then trouble came to him from Armande herself; and before a year had passed he cursed his fatal love and his weakness, more fatal still. The story of Armande Béjard has been written in a rare and curious book called *La Fameuse Comédienne*, from which the following passages may be cited:—

"Molière's fame brought more lovers to his wife than that pretended merit which afterwards rendered her so proud and haughty. There was no one at the Court who did not attempt to gain her favours. The Abbé de Richelieu was one of the first who determined to make her his mistress. As he

was very liberal, while the young lady was extremely fond of expenditure. the matter was soon concluded. It was agreed that he should pay her four pistoles a day, without counting clothes and entertainments, which were to be thrown in. The Abbé did not fail to send her every morning by a page the pledge of their treaty, nor to go and see her every afternoon.

“This lasted for some months without trouble; but Molière, having written the *Princesse d'Elide*, in which his wife played the principal part, which was the first important part in which she had appeared, because Mdle. du Parc took them all, she became the heroine of the theatre, and made such a striking effect that Molière had reason to repent having exhibited her in the midst of the brilliant young men of the Court; for, scarcely had she been seen at Chambord, where the King gave this entertainment to all the Court, than she fell madly in love with Count de Guiche, while Count de Lauzun fell madly in love with her. This latter spared no effort to obtain her good graces, but La Molière, who had quite lost her head, would not listen to his offers, and contented herself with visiting Mdle. du Parc, and weeping her

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eyes out for the indifference showed towards her by Count de Guiche.

“Count de Lauzun had not, however, abandoned all hope, having found by experience that nothing could resist him. . . . He knew, moreover, that Count de Guiche was a man who cared but little for a woman's love. For this reason he felt sure that his carelessness would displease La Molière in the end, and that then his own star would produce in her heart what it had produced in the heart of all the women whom he had sought to please. He was not deceived; La Molière, irritated by the coldness of Count de Guiche, threw herself into the arms of Count de Lauzun, as if to protect herself against suffering any more from the ingratitude of a man who did not appreciate her. Meanwhile the Abbé de Richelieu had been informed of this; he had her watched, and managed to get possession of a letter which she had written to the Count de Guiche.”

The terms of this letter showed clearly to the Abbé that Armande had never cared for anyone but Count de Guiche, even when she was making

the most energetic protestations to the Abbé. Furious at having been duped, he "did not amuse himself by uttering reproaches, which serve no purpose whatever, but congratulated himself on having engaged her only by the day, and resolved to drop her, which he did, after calling Molière's attention to the fact that the great care he took to please the public left him no time for examining the conduct of his wife; and that, while he was working to divert everyone, everyone worked to divert her."

Hitherto the reports about Armande, which had been spread throughout the Court, had not reached Molière himself. The charitable revelations of the Abbé de Richelieu struck him like a thunderbolt. Without taking time to reflect or to verify, he ran to his wife in a state of despair, mad with grief. Then he burst forth into bitter reproaches, spoke of his love and of his rights, and of the unworthiness of outraging a husband who was at once the most tender of fathers and the most attached of lovers.

To these reproaches Armande replied first only by a torrent of tears—

"For women, when they list, can cry."

It was not only on the stage that she was a great actress. Then, little by little, with infinite art, she repelled all her husband's accusations. Too clever to deny her inclination for Count de Guiche, she spoke of it as a fancy as innocent as it was fleeting, and for which, moreover, she was sorry, hoping it might be excused by reason of her youth. She swore that nothing wrong had taken place, and that she had quite recovered from her error; making this confession with so touching a voice, and so ingenuous an air, that her innocence seemed to speak for itself.

The tears of the adored one are more eloquent, more convincing, than any justification in logical form. Molière was in love with Armande. How, then, could he entertain any doubts on the subject of her virtue? Not only did he forgive her, he even begged her to forgive him; admitting and deeply regretting that he had lost his temper. She was magnanimous enough to grant him the pardon he implored. Peace was signed.

Alas, it was but a truce. Returning to Paris after the *fêtes* of Chambord, Armande began her ingenuities anew. "Molière's home," says a writer,

"was now a hell." Vainly did he seek to close his eyes. Every moment he was forced by her audacity to open them. He had too many enemies, moreover, to be able to rest in peace. His love for Armande was the weak point in his armour, and it was through her that he was constantly wounded. He would but too gladly have been deceived. But Armande now scarcely gave herself the trouble to practise any deception. One storm followed another without interruption; and every day there was some new piece of perfidy followed by a new forgiveness.

While cursing his indescribable weakness, Molière could not escape from it. He was without strength and without courage in the presence of the disgraceful woman, who could equally raise him to the seventh heaven of happiness or plunge him into the lowest abyss of despair. These sudden transitions broke the great man's heart, and in the end they were to destroy his life.

Victor Hugo, in the admirable speech he delivered at Balzac's funeral, dwelt on the fact that the author of *La Comédie Humaine* had risen uninjured from those formidable studies which pro-

duced the "melancholy of Molière, and the misanthropy of Rousseau." But external circumstances might alone account for Molière's profound sadness.

Meanwhile, in the midst of these domestic tempests, Armande Béjard had presented her husband with two children: a son, who had for god-parents King Louis XIV. and Mme. Henriette, and a daughter, who was held at the baptismal font by the Count of Molyneux and Madeleine Béjard.

Molière may have hoped that the children would bring peace to his household; but Armande Béjard was a bad mother, and as her daughter grew up, all she saw in her was a living, incontestable proof of her own age.

"How old are you?" said someone to the young girl when she was just budding into womanhood.

"Sixteen and a half," she replied; "but," she added, "do not tell mamma."

Armande took no interest in the works of genius produced by her husband, and to the homage and affection of the great writer, preferred the insipid compliments of witless courtiers. She was followed

wherever she went by crowds of suitors, and at the theatre her room was often so full of admirers that her husband, wishing to enter it, could find no place.

She had now established a regular connection with a woman employed at the theatre as box-keeper, or in some similar capacity, who served as medium between Armande and her too numerous admirers. This honest creature, Châteauneuf by name, had made La Molière's acquaintance soon after her return from Chambord, and gradually became her confidant and accomplice in all her love affairs. It was only through Châteauneuf that Armande could be approached, and the conquest of the famous beauty was now but a question of money. At the same time Châteauneuf acted with so much discretion that many persons looked upon La Molière as a model of perfection.

At last Molière's friends were so indignant at his wife's conduct that they intervened in the interest of the great man's personal dignity, and endeavoured to recall him to a sense of propriety and honour. Some new incident occurred just then which made him lose all patience, and



in a fit of ungovernable rage he declared to his wife that he had resolved to have her shut up.

At this threat Armande went into despair, fainted away, and, first unconscious, appeared after a time to be dying. At the sight of his expiring wife, all Molière's love returned, and he once more forgave. But this time Armande, who had begun by being unfaithful to her husband through no fault of his, had conceived a violent hatred for him, and she determined, since he had spoken of separation, to profit by the suggestion and live apart from him. The more Molière protested and excused himself, the more overbearing did she become, and now she in her turn declared herself jealous. All their quarrels, she said, were due to the presence in the house of that odious de Brie. She accused her husband of keeping up his relations with this woman, and also with her sister Madeleine. At last she declared that she "no longer had the courage to live with him, that she would rather die, and that everything between them must come to an end."

In vain did Molière, now in despair, try to make her change her terrible resolution. She remained

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firm, and it was agreed that, while living in the same house, they should occupy separate apartments, should treat one another as strangers, and only speak when it was absolutely necessary at the theatre. Molière had a house and garden at Auteuil to which he was in the habit of retiring when engaged on literary work which demanded deep attention; and it was here that he was visited by Chappelle, one of his best friends, who, finding him in distress, asked what had happened.

For a time Molière resisted Chappelle's importunities, but at last, in a paroxysm of grief, he confessed that he was always thinking of his beloved Armande, and could not bear to be separated from her. Chappelle expressed his astonishment that a man who so excelled in painting human weakness could be himself so weak. Was he not falling into the very absurdities which he ridiculed in his admirable comedies. Finally he undertook to prove to him that there is nothing so foolish as to love a woman who does not love in return.

"As for me," he said, "I confess that if I were unfortunate enough to find myself in such a posi-

tion, and were fully persuaded that the person I loved granted her favours to others, I should feel such a contempt for her as would infallibly cure me of my passion. There is a satisfaction open to you, moreover, which you would not have if she were only your mistress; and that vengeance which generally takes the place of love in an outraged heart, can compensate you for all the grief which your wife causes you, since you can at once shut her up. There could be no better means, moreover, of placing your mind at rest."

Molière, after listening quietly to all his friend had to say, asked him whether he himself had never been in love.

"Yes," replied Chappelle, "I have been in love, as a man of sense ought to be, but I should never have hesitated about a course prescribed to me by my honour; and I blush to find you in such a state of indecision on the point."

"You have never really loved," answered Molière. "You have taken the semblance of love for love itself. I will not relate to you an infinity of examples which would demonstrate to you the power of this passion. I will only give you a

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true account of my own trouble, in order that you may understand how little one is master of one's self when this passion has really acquired a dominating influence.

"As for the perfect knowledge of the human heart, which you attribute to me by reason of the representations I offer constantly to the public, I will acknowledge that I have endeavoured as much as possible to understand it. But if my studies have taught me that danger ought to be avoided, I have learned from my experience that to do so is sometimes impossible. I judge daily by my own case. I have by nature a soft heart, and my efforts have never enabled me to conquer my inclinations towards love. I was convinced that few women indeed deserve sincere affection; that interest, ambition, vanity are at the bottom of their intrigues. I thought, however, that the simplicity of my choice ensured my happiness. I took my wife, so to say, from the cradle, and brought her up with all the care possible. I had persuaded myself that I could inspire her by habit with sentiments that time alone would destroy; and I left no effort untried in order to reach this end.

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As she was very young when I married her, I was not aware of her evil inclinations, and thought myself a little less unfortunate than the majority of those who contract such engagements.

“Accordingly, marriage did not lessen my affection; but I found her before long so indifferent, that I could not but perceive how useless my precautions had been, and that her feelings towards me were very different from what I could desire. I reproached myself with a susceptibility bordering on the ridiculous, and attributed to my wife’s temper and caprice what was really the result of her want of affection. I had plenty of opportunities of convincing myself of my error; and the insane passion which she contracted soon afterwards for Count de Guiche was too much spoken about to leave me even the appearance of tranquillity. I spared no endeavour, now that I knew the truth, to conquer myself, knowing that it was impossible to change her. I employed all the strength of mind that I could command. I called to my assistance everything that could help to console me. I looked upon her as a person whose sole merit had consisted in her innocence, and who, hav-

ing lost that, had lost everything. I now adopted the resolution of living with her as an honest man might do with a woman of coquettish disposition, whom he knew to be coquettish; resolved, since it was impossible to reform her conduct, to preserve, as much as possible, her reputation. But to my grief I found that a person without great beauty, and who owed such wit as she possesses to the education given to her by myself, could in an instant destroy all my philosophy.

“Her presence made me forget all my resolutions, and the first words she said in her defence left me so convinced that my suspicions were ill-founded, that I begged her pardon for having been so credulous. My kindness had no effect upon her.

“At last, then, I determined to live with her as though she were not my wife; but if you knew all the suffering this has caused me, you would have pity on me.

“My passion reached such a point as to make me, from mere compassion, take her part; and when I consider how impossible it is for me to overcome what I feel for her, I say to myself that

perhaps she has the same difficulty in destroying the inclination she has towards coquettishness, and I find myself more disposed to pity than to blame her.

“You will say, perhaps, that one must be pitied for loving in this manner. But, for my part, I hold that there is only one kind of love, and that people who have not felt such tenderness of mind have never really loved.

“Everything in the world is connected in my mind with her. So entirely am I occupied with her, that there is nothing which in her absence can give me any enjoyment. When I see her, emotion, transports which one may feel but cannot express, render it impossible for me to reflect. I have no eyes for her defects, and see in her nothing but her lovable qualities. The last point of madness, is it not? And is it not marvellous that my reason, while revealing to me my weakness, does not enable me to overcome it?”

Chappelle withdrew, deeply pained. The spectacle of so much grief and so much weakness had moved the heart of this epicurean, who is said to

have "passed through life joyously, glass in hand, and crowned with roses." He did not attempt to console his friend. "You are more to be pitied than I thought," he said to him. "We must hope that time will bring relief."

But years passed, and still the unhappy man suffered. He drank the cup of bitterness to the dregs. "Such misery," suggests one of Molière's biographers, "is perhaps the fatal expiation of genius." Molière was, at the time of Chappelle's visit, writing the *Misanthrope*, that masterpiece, in which at times one seems to hear Molière speaking out of the fulness of his own heart, and initiating the whole world into the closest and most painful secrets of his life. "This Célimène," says a biographer, "so futile and so charming, so dangerous and so seductive, is an incorrigible coquette, who does not understand what a noble heart she is wounding, even to death. Is this not Armande Béjard, embellished by all the love and all the genius of Molière?"

'And Alceste; who is he? At the first representations people thought that they had recognised the Duke de Montansier, and the Duke said when

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the remark was made, 'Much obliged for the honour.' We, for our part, recognise Molière himself. This misanthrope is something more than a mere malcontent. This misanthrope is a great genius, misunderstood, suffering and waiting; a passionate sage, and honest man with a great and excellent heart.

"And moving around these principal personages cannot we identify the others? Under the fair wig of Acaste, so proud of his ribbons and his finery generally, cannot we distinguish the Count de Guiche? The real name of Clitandre is De Lauzun. Thus Molière satirises his wife's lovers, and, on the stage at least, makes them ridiculous."

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### CHAPTER III.

MOLIÈRE, not satisfied with writing the part of Alceste, wished also to act it; and he did so, according to a contemporary writer, with terrible verve. At this moment, Molière, in accordance

with the arrangement made between himself and his wife, never saw her except at the theatre. While he took the part of Alceste, she took that of Célimène, and people asserted that he had written the comedy solely in order to be able without baseness to say to the perfidious one, "I love you!"—solely that he might be able to fall at her feet, and promise to forget and to forgive.

"Molière," says a writer on this subject, "seems to delight in reviving all the grief of the past. He recalls all, even the slightest particulars of his love. What Alceste suffers in the scene of the letter, he suffered the day when the Abbé de Richelieu, in a spirit of vengeance worthy only of a lackey, placed in his hands the letter she had addressed to the Count de Guiche. Chamfort said with reason: 'The *Misanthrope* is a sublime matrimonial quarrel.' When called upon to justify herself, Célimène replies: 'For my part, I do not like him, Armandè.' The words seem to come from Molière's own wife. 'For my part, he does not please me.' No, he did not please this courtesan without soul, ancestress of all the 'filles de marbre' of the future. Nor did it please her

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to break with her life of gallantry and of disorder.

"Again, when Alceste replies to Philinte's representations, do we not hear Molière explaining his position to Chappelle:—

'Non l'amour que je sens pour cette jeune veuve  
Ne ferme point nes yeux aux défauts qu'on lui trouve  
Et je suis, quelque ardeur qu'elle n'ait pu donner,  
Le premier à les voir comme à les condamner.  
Mais avec tout cela, quoi que je puisse faire,  
Je confesse mon faible, elle a l'art de me plaire :  
J'ai beau voir ses défauts et j'ai beau l'en blamer,  
En dépit qu'on en ait, elle se fait aimer.  
Sa grâce est la plus forte ; et sans doute ma flamme  
De ces vices du temps pourra purger son âme.'

In the last two verses a secret hope may be detected."

This last illusion, however, was soon, like so many others, to vanish. Armande was incorrigible, and her final act of perfidy was the worst of all.

One day, among some child-actors who were playing a piece in the Bois de Boulogne, Molière had noticed a boy of eleven, who was good-looking, vivacious, and endowed by nature with a talent for mimicry. Molière thought he saw in him the making of a fine actor. He gave him a few

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lessons, and at last took him into his house, fed and clothed him, supplied him with money, and treated him in fact as an adopted son. The boy, Boiron, or, more euphoniously, Baron by name, became, indeed, under the latter appellation, one of the best actors of the Comédie Française. He became, also, the most illustrious coxcomb of his time. To him is due the remark that "actors ought to be brought up in the laps of queens."

Gratitude was not one of his distinguished traits. He had found favour in the eyes of Mdlle. Molière; or it may have been himself who began the familiarity. He in any case betrayed his benefactor. Strange that Molière should have been at the same time deceived by the woman whom he had educated as a little girl, and by the young man whom he had absolutely adopted! Yet for some years the two did not get on at all well together; and one day, at a rehearsal of *Mélicerte*, in which Baron played the part of Myrtil, Armande gave him a box on the ear. Thereupon the young actor took offence, and joined some provincial company. Molière, to his misfortune, begged him to come back; and he returned.

According to the account given of the matter by the brothers Parfait, Molière's wife, as long as she lived with her husband, hated Baron as a little mischief-maker who was constantly causing trouble between husband and wife by his tales; and as hatred, equally with other passions, causes blindness, she was unable even to see that he was good-looking. But when they had nothing in common, she would look at him without prejudice, and it soon struck her that she could make of him an agreeable toy.

The play of *Psyché*, which was then being acted, fell in with her designs, and it was through their appearing together in this piece that their love began.

"La Molière represented *Psyché* in charming style, and Baron, to whom Love had been assigned, was admirable in the part. The praises given to them in common led them to observe one another with attention, and neither seemed dissatisfied. Baron no sooner perceived the change which had taken place in his favour than he at once replied to it. He was the first to break the silence; and he told her how happy he felt at having been

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chosen to represent her lover, that he owed the approbation of the public to this fortunate chance, that it was not difficult to act what one naturally felt, and that he would always be the best actor in the world if his good luck in this respect continued."

La Molière replied that the praise he received was due to his merit alone, and that she had nothing to do with it; but that compliments from a man who was said to have so many mistresses did not surprise her, and that he was doubtless as good an actor in a lady's drawing-room as on the stage.

Baron, whom this style of reproach did not at all offend, said, with an indolent air, that he had indeed accustomed himself to what were called "bonnes fortunes," but that he was ready to sacrifice them all, and that the slightest favour from her would be more to him than all that other women could give. Several of these, with a discretion natural to him, he at once named.

La Molière was delighted at this preference; her vanity and self-love being especially gratified

by the idea of so many rivals being sacrificed to her.

But there was too much similarity in their dispositions for them to agree. Each had inspired the other with only a passing fancy. Armande did not dismiss one of her lovers, nor Baron one of his mistresses. Jealousy led to reproaches, reproaches to quarrels; and before the performance of *Psyché* had come to an end, all was over between them. They had come together without remorse, and they separated without regret; but hating one another, indeed, more than ever. Each saw the other's weak points, and mutual contempt was the result.

Towards the end of 1671, Molière's friends, observing that his melancholy was on the increase, tried to bring about a reconciliation between him and his wife; and they, in fact, succeeded. But already his health showed signs of giving way. His chest was affected; and instead of taking care of himself, and observing a strict regimen, he adopted the habits of his wife and her friends. Armande was fond of suppers, and to please her Molière supped, too; when in lieu of the two

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cups of milk which had previously sufficed, he drank copiously of wine. He now suffered, not only in his heart and soul, but also in his body.

Instead of consulting doctors, as any other man would have done, he now attacked them in his severest style.

On the 10th February 1673, the *Malade Imaginaire* was performed for the first time. The faculty was soon to be avenged. At the fourth representation, February 17, 1673, being the first anniversary of the death of Madeleine Béjard, Molière, who was taking the part of Argan, felt himself getting worse. Baron, Armande, and all the members of the company, implored him not to go on playing, but to take a little rest.

"How can I?" he replied. "There are fifty workmen here who are paid by the day, and what will they do if the theatre is shut up, and they lose their money?"

The performance had not yet begun. The curtain was to rise at four o'clock, and a few minutes afterwards Molière was on the stage, and acting with his accustomed humour. Everyone was laugh-



ing and applauding. No one, at least among the lookers-on, suspected that the actor, who was throwing all his energy into the part he had himself created, was now on the point of death. In the burlesque ceremony, just as Argan has to utter the word "Juro," a convulsion seized him, which he disguised beneath a forced laugh. But it was now necessary to carry him home. The performance went on, but without Molière, who meanwhile had been taken to his house in the Rue Richelieu. It had been found impossible to get his clothes off. The dying man was still wearing the dressing-gown of the "Imaginary Invalid." He was presently attacked with a violent fit of coughing, in the course of which he burst a blood-vessel, and threw up a quantity of blood. A few minutes later he expired, surrounded by the members of his family, and supported by two nuns to whom he was in the habit of offering hospitality when they visited Paris.

It is interesting to speculate whether, had he not died thus suddenly, he would ever have given himself the trouble to bring out a complete edition

of his works. This, like Shakespere, he failed to do, or perhaps purposely abstained from doing. He wrote his plays, as he himself said, that they might be heard on the stage, not studied in private; and when, as in some cases happened, one of his plays was printed under his direct superintendence, the fact was to be accounted for by his wish to supersede some spurious edition which had got into circulation. Yet no French author is now so universally read. As Saint Beuve so happily says, in the preface to some edition of Molière's plays, "everyone who learns to read is an additional reader for Molière."

In his dying moments he had asked for religious consolation; but the priest of Saint Eustache rejected his prayer. Now that he was dead, he was denied Christian burial: a piece of intolerance for which the Archbishop of Paris, Harley de Champvalon, was responsible. He had apparently not forgotten *Tartufe*. The refusal of the clergy to bury the great dramatist caused great scandal; and the indignation of the public found expression in the following epigram from the pen of his friend Chappelle:—

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“ Puisque à Paris on dénie  
La terre, après le trépas,  
A ceux qui pendant leur vie  
Ont joué la comédie,  
Pourquoi ne jette-t-on pas  
Les bigots à la voirie ?  
Ils sont dans le même cas.”

These lines prove that, apart from all question as to what were the orders and injunctions of the Church on the subject, it was customary in Molière's time to deny to actors the right of burial in consecrated ground. This was shown half a century afterwards in the case of Adrienne Lecouvreur; and, again, as late as 1815, when the church doors were closed against the body of Mdlle. Raucourt. Indeed, thirty years later still, in the case of a little known but in all respects estimable actress, Mme. Maucherat, who died in 1844, at Boulogne sur-Mer, the clergy refused to allow the body to be brought into the church. The mayor, however, possessed the right to order the church doors to be open, and he exercised it. Then volunteers entered the church and took upon themselves to toll the bell. To prevent any further scandal, the clergy consented to relieve the body, and, performing a silent mass over the poor woman's remains,

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sprinkled the coffin with holy water. Finally the body was interred in the usual way in the cemetery, whither, as in the case of Mdlle. Raucourt at Paris, it was followed by an immense and indignant crowd.

Mr F. C. Burnand, in an interesting and valuable article contributed to the *Fortnightly Review*, has argued that actors do not, as such, lie under any ecclesiastical bann, and he has shown that when Monseigneur Affre, Archbishop of Paris, was waited upon in 1848 by a delegation of actors, who desired that the supposed bann might be raised, he replied that it had never existed. By custom, all the same, actors had from generation to generation been regarded in France as beyond the pale of the Church.

To suppose that actors and actresses have at any time been regarded by the Church as a proscribed class, seems a little absurd when one remembers that opera took its rise in the palaces of cardinals, who, indeed, may claim to be the inventors of the lyric drama. If in our own time, and in England, an eminent and justly respected cardinal has declared that, "from the Italian opera to the penny gaff, dramatic entertainments are

all links in one long devil's chain," that at least was not the opinion of the Italian cardinals who in the sixteenth century founded Italian opera.

On the death of Molière, Armande, for once in her life, behaved nobly. It is difficult to believe that Molière could have loved her so passionately had there not been some spark of the divine in her nature, concealed though it may have been,—concealed as it certainly was,—by only too much that was base. She knew that her husband was a great man, and at the moment of his loss must have felt how deeply she had wronged him. When she heard of the Archbishop's refusal, she exclaimed in her indignation,—

"They refuse to bury a man to whom, in Greece, altars would have been erected."

Then, calling for a carriage, and taking with her the Curé of Auteuil, who was far from sharing the views of his ecclesiastical superior, she hurried to Versailles, threw herself at the King's feet, and demanded justice.

"If," she exclaimed, losing all self-control, "if my husband was a criminal, his crimes were sanctioned by your majesty in person."

At these words the King frowned, and the Curé of Auteuil is said to have found the moment opportune for introducing a theological discussion, in the course of which he sought to disculpate himself from an accusation of Jansenism. But Louis XIV. had been affronted, and he told both actress and Curé that the matter concerned the Archbishop alone. He sent secret orders, however, to the "churlish" prelate, the result of which was a compromise. The body was refused entrance into the church, but two priests were allowed to accompany it to the cemetery. The Archbishop's concession seemed to some bigots out of place; a proof that the ecclesiastical authorities were not alone in their wish to have Molière buried without Christian rites. They could not now prevent his being buried in sacred ground. But on the day of his funeral they organised a riot in front of his house, which Armande, frightened by the cries and menaces of the crowd, could only appease by throwing money out of the window to the amount of about a thousand francs. Finally, on 21st February 1673, the remains of the great man were borne to their resting-place, without pomp, without

ceremony, at night, and almost furtively, as though he had been a criminal. Molière was buried in the cemetery of Saint Joseph, Rue Montmartre. His widow placed above the grave a great slab of stone, which was still to be seen, in the early part of the eighteenth century, when the brothers Parfait published their *Histoire du Théâtre Français*.

"This stone," writes T— du Tillet, "is cracked down the middle; which was caused by a very noble and very remarkable action on the part of the widow. Two or three years after Molière's death there was a very cold winter, and she had conveyed to the cemetery a hundred loads of wood, which was burned on the tomb of her husband to warm all the poor people of the quarter, when the great heat of the fire caused the stone to crack in two."

Soon—too soon—after her husband's death, Armande reappeared on the stage. She seemed, says a writer of the time, "to have lost something of her talent." She had lost, in fact, her husband's counsels. But for Molière, her passion for finery would often have led her into absurdities.

The dresses she wore became her in one sense, but they were often unsuitable to the part she was playing. Thus it is recorded of her that, the night of the first performance of *Tartufe*, she had dressed herself so splendidly that Molière was obliged to insist on her adopting a much simpler toilette.

"What can you mean by such attire?" he exclaimed. "Don't you know that you are in distress? Yet you are dressed out and decorated as if for a *fête*. Undress as quickly as you can, and put on a costume more suitable to your supposed position."

The result of this advice was a violent quarrel, which at last took such proportions that Armande refused to play, and could only with great difficulty be got to appear.

Molière had not long been dead when his easily consolable widow began her amorous pranks anew. Châteauneuf was still at hand to direct and profit by her intrigues. The most famous of her admirers at this period of her life was a certain M. Du Boulay, described as "sufficiently a man of the world, with something of the air of a government



clerk." Du Boulay was rich and generous, so that Armande could scarcely fail to like him. He is said to have shown so much fondness for her that Châteauneuf declared this to be no ordinary case, and recommended Mdle. Molière to make the man marry her. Accepting the hint, Armande kept M. Du Boulay at a great distance, gave herself the airs of a prude, and behaved, in the language of the art, "cruelly" towards him — probably for the first time in her life. The new part which she had undertaken was, however, unsuited to her character, and so contrary to her experience that she could not keep it up. M. Du Boulay, on his side, had observed the trap which had been laid for him, and behaved with due caution. Quite resolved never to become Armande's husband, he promised her everything she might wish, with marriage as the one single exception. He was prodigal in declarations of love; but as soon as the marriage question was touched or even hinted at became silent.

This love comedy, in a style to which Armande was not accustomed, left a great deal of leisure time upon her hands; and she employed it in tak-

ing steps for carrying away from an actress, who had probably given herself airs, her recognised lover. The name of the actress was Guiot, that of the actor Guérin. Guérin is said to have been wretched as an actor, and by no means attractive as a man. Possessing enough self-consciousness to be aware of his own inferiority, he was quite surprised when he found La Molière making love to him. He showed great promptitude, however, in profiting by the situation, and La Molière was not allowed to pine for him in vain.

Guérin is described as a subtle, insinuating, cunning character; capable of the last baseness when his own interests were at stake. He studied Armande carefully, and soon mastered the character of this thorough young coquette. He understood that before all and above all he must declare himself her slave, and worship her caprices on his knees. This was only an affair of acting, and he acquitted himself successfully of his part. As it would be necessary for Armande's sake to give up Mdle. Guiot, he did not hesitate to behave with the necessary treachery, but thought it prudent not to be hasty in the matter, so that Mme.

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Molière might not think that to please her he threw over another woman at a moment's notice.

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## CHAPTER IV.

WE shall hear more of Guérin. Meanwhile Mme. Molière was about to play a passive part in a very strange drama, the incidents of which she turned in the most ingenious manner to her own advantage.

A woman who resembled La Molière in so striking a manner that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other, was mistaken one day for La Molière by the President Lescot. Seeing the error he had made, she resolved to profit by it. She accepted, therefore, the name given to her by her unknown admirer. But the story is told with so much circumstantiality by the brothers Parfait and other contemporary writers and it is in itself so interesting, that it seems a pity to abridge it:—

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"There was a creature at Paris named Latourelle who resembled La Molière so perfectly that it was difficult to distinguish between them. She led the same sort of life as La Molière, but with less success; which made her think, seeing how much she was like her, that it would be a good idea to pass for her, which could easily be done with those who were not well acquainted with her.

"The device succeeded so well, for several months, that many persons were taken in. The President of Grenoble, named Lescot, who had fallen in love with La Molière from having seen her on the stage, was looking all over Paris for someone who could introduce him to her. He was often in relations with a woman named Ledoux, whose business it was to make herself as agreeable as possible. He informed her that he wished very much indeed to make the acquaintance of La Molière, and that if she could arrange the matter for him, money need not stand in the way.

"Ledoux was unfortunate enough not to know her. She might easily have got introduced to her had she known how to set to work. It occurred to her, however, that without giving herself any

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trouble, she had only to get Latourelle to impersonate the lady. She accordingly told the President that she was not personally acquainted with her, but that she knew someone who had great influence over her, that she would have her informed on the subject, and that as soon as there was any reply he should be communicated with. The President begged her to leave nothing untried in order to secure his being presented to La Molière, and at the same time promised boundless gratitude.

“As soon as he had left her she sent for Latourelle, and told her that she had found an excellent dupe, who must at once be turned to account, that she would send for her on a certain day, and that she must be prepared to play the part of La Molière. The next day the President returned of his own accord to inquire as to the result of the negotiations. Ledoux told him that he was in too great a hurry, that all she had hitherto been able to do was to get her friend to speak to La Molière about him, and that he must really have a little patience. The President begged her to lose no unnecessary time, and came

to her day by day to know how things were going on.

“At last, when Ledoux had let enough time pass to justify her in charging well for it, she told the President, with many expressions of joy, that she had surmounted the obstacles which had hitherto stood in the way of his passion, and that La Molière had promised to call upon her the next day, when the President could meet her. Delighted beyond measure, he promised to remember all his life the service she was rendering him, noted the hour of the appointment, and, in his eagerness, came long before the time. When at the proper moment the lady appeared, she was dressed in so negligent a manner that it was necessary to explain that she had avoided finery in order to escape recognition. She affected a little cough which La Molière habitually put on, together with her self-satisfied airs and her vaporous manner; in fact, played her part so well that a man much better informed than the President might easily have been taken in. She impressed upon him, moreover, that he ought to be very grateful to her for coming to meet him in such a place, this

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being the sort of thing to which she was in no way accustomed. The very idea of it filled her with horror. The President told her that she only had to estimate the pecuniary equivalent of his gratitude, and that everything he possessed was at her service.

"Latourelle declared that money was the last thing she cared for, being herself well provided in that respect. She ended, however, by consenting to accept a present from him, provided it were only of trifling value. A bracelet for her daughter, who was in religion, was the most she could accept. The President at once took her to the Jeweller's Quay, where he begged her to choose whatever necklace she liked best. She insisted upon restricting her choice to the cheapest that could be found; and these magnificent manners had upon the President their due effect. He became more infatuated than ever.

"He continued to meet her at the same place, and she always made a point of telling him not to speak to her if he chanced to meet her at the theatre, as that would be a sure way of destroying her in the opinion of her fellow-actresses, who

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were extremely jealous of her, and would be delighted to have a pretext for speaking against her. He obeyed her implicitly, and when he went to the theatre contented himself with admiring her at a distance on the stage.

“And he had every right to admire La Molière in the part of Circe, which she was now playing, and which she played to perfection. In her enchantress’s dress, with her hair flowing abundantly down her shoulders, she was indeed charming.

“One day, when Latourelle had made an appointment with the President at the house of Ledoux, she failed to keep it. After waiting for her a long time, he resolved to go to the theatre, and all the arguments of Ledoux were insufficient to prevent him from carrying out his determination. He accordingly went to the Comédie Française, where the first person he saw on the stage was La Molière.

“In spite of her injunction to the contrary, he decided to go to her on the stage, thinking that a little display of passion would after all make a favourable impression upon her. He wished,



moreover, to tell her how grieved he had been at her not having come to meet him that afternoon.

"But, in the first place, he was unable to speak to her by reason of her being surrounded by a number of young men, who were overloading her with their attentions. He contented himself with smiling whenever she happened to turn her head in his direction, until at last, when she passed by one of the wings where he had stationed himself, he said to her,—

"‘I never saw you look so beautiful before. If I did not already love you, I should do so from this moment.’

"La Molière paid no attention to these words, thinking really that she had to do with a man who liked her personal appearance, and profited by the first opportunity to assure her of the fact. The President, however, was indignant to find how small an impression his compliments made upon her.

"The piece seemed to him insupportably long, but he resolved to speak to her as soon as it was over, and accordingly, just before the fall of the

curtain, he went to her dressing-room, and remained at the door to await her arrival.

“La Molière, however, had imperious ways, and the liberty that the President was taking seemed to her more than she could tolerate from a man who had never been introduced to her, and whom she had never seen before. It is quite allowable to visit an actress in her dressing-room, but the visitor must at least be someone with whom she is acquainted. La Molière had never seen the President in her life; she was surprised at his audacity, and to punish him for it resolved not to answer one word to whatever he might say to her. At first it occurred to him that she did not like to speak in presence of her maid; he accordingly made a sign to La Molière to send the girl away, as if on the ground that he had some private communication to make. La Molière would not deign to reply to signs which she in no way understood.

“But the President, who considered himself on sufficiently intimate terms for her to be able to understand what he wanted, though she still remained dumb, mistook for proofs of anger her

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constant refusal to answer him, or even acknowledge his presence. He asked her, in his desire to know what had caused so much coldness, why he had not the happiness of seeing her that afternoon. La Molière asked him in a loud voice what he was talking about. He requested her in a low voice to send the girl away, before whom it was scarcely possible to say what he had to say.

“La Molière, astonished at his language, said to him in a voice louder than ever,—

“‘I do not understand your mysterious ways. Anything you may have to say to me you may say openly before the whole world.’

“This she cried out in such a sharp tone that the President lost all patience and said to her,—

“‘I should understand you if I had, ever since I have known you, done the least thing to vex you. But I have nothing to reproach myself with in this respect, and when you fail to keep an appointment made by yourself, and in my anxiety I hurry to inquire whether any accident has happened to you, you treat me as if I were the worst of men.’

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"It would be impossible to describe La Molière's astonishment. The more she looked at the President the less did she remember ever having seen him before. Meanwhile he had the appearance of a gentleman, and the emotion with which he continued to reproach her showed that he was not amusing himself at her expense, nor endeavouring to win a wager. She was at a loss to understand the situation. The President, on his side, could not understand La Molière's silence.

" 'Give me,' he said at last, 'some reason, good or bad, in justification of your conduct.'

"He paused in the hope of a reply, but she was still lost in astonishment, and could not say a word. At last La Molière resolved to get at the bottom of an affair of which hitherto she had been unable to make anything. She asked the President, with the greatest seriousness, whether he persisted in saying that he was acquainted with her. At first she might have thought that it was a joke, but his pleasantry, if such it were, was being carried to such a pitch that she could no longer tolerate it, above all, now that he had had the

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audacity to maintain that she had failed to keep an appointment which he accused her of having made.

“‘Great heavens!’ exclaimed the President, ‘how can a woman swear to a man that she has never seen him before after such intimacy as has existed between you and me. I am grieved that you should force me to forget myself, and to fail in the respect which I entertain for all women, but no respect can be due to you. After having come to meet me a score of times in such a place as the one where I have been in the habit of seeing you,—most worthless of women,—to ask me how I can claim to know you!’

“It can be imagined that La Molière, with such a temper as hers, could not listen calmly to these harsh words, and thinking her visitor meant simply to insult her, she told her maid to call in some members of the company.

“‘The best thing you can do,’ said the indignant lover; ‘I should like all Paris to be present, in order that your shame may be published everywhere.’

“‘Insolent man, I will soon bring you to

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reason!’ cried La Molière. At this moment several actors entered the dressing-room, where they found the President in an inconceivable rage, and the young lady in such a passion that she was unable to speak. At last, however, she managed little by little to explain to her friends why she had been obliged to send for them; while the President, on his side, explained the matter from his point of view, declaring that he had met La Molière often before, and that the very necklace she was wearing was a present he had made her.

“At these words La Molière tried to box his ears, but he seized her by the hands, and snatched the necklace from her. Afterwards he declared in a most positive manner that it was the very one he had himself given her—though the one he had given Latourelle was really much larger. At this last insult La Molière called in the guard attached to the theatre. The doors were all closed, and a commissary of police was sent for, who, taking the President in charge, conducted him to prison, where he was detained until the next morning, when he went out under bail, still maintaining that he could justify his conduct towards

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La Molière, still unable to believe that it was not she whom he had met at the house of Ledoux.

“La Molière, who felt the insult she had received, demanded the fullest reparation, and the police began to go into the matter. In the first place, she was confronted with the goldsmith, which, she thought, would at once put an end to the false accusation. But to her astonishment and confusion he declared that she was the woman who had bought the necklace, in company with the President. She was inconsolable at being accused of a fault she had not committed; and the next step was to find Ledoux, at whose house the President claimed on so many occasions to have met her. But at the first news of the misunderstanding the prudent woman had taken flight, and she could now nowhere be found.

“At last, however, Ledoux was caught, when she confessed that there was a woman in Paris named Latourelle who presented an extraordinary resemblance to La Molière; that many persons had been taken in by it, and the President Lescot among the number. In due time Latourelle also

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was arrested, and La Molière was now in the highest state of delight, it having occurred to her that all her past misconduct could be explained by throwing the blame of it on Latourelle, who so much resembled her. She, of course, instituted an action against her rival, and as she had plenty of money, everything went according to her desire, in spite of the injustice that there was in punishing her for a kind of offence in which La Molière could have given her lessons."

It will seem, however, to most persons that, apart from the question of immorality, Latourelle had rendered herself exceptionally guilty by casting the blame of her misconduct upon another woman.

The President Lescot was condemned to a fine and "verbal reparation." He had to pay two hundred crowns, and to declare in court, in presence of La Molière and any four persons she might choose, that through error and inadvertence he had raised his hands against her, and held the insulting language mentioned in the indictment, through having taken her for another person.

The same judgment condemned "the two women



to be flogged naked with rods before the principal gate of the Châtelet, and before the house of the said Molière." But Ledoux alone underwent her punishment. Latourelle, who had friends in every direction, managed to escape.

Thomas Corneille, in *L'Inconnu*, makes reference to this affair, and the allusion was more readily seized inasmuch as Armande played the principal part in the piece. She represented the Countess, to whom an old gipsy, in telling her fortune, addresses the following lines of verse:—

"Cette ligne qui croise avec celle de vie  
Marque pour votre gloire un moment très fatal :  
Sur des traits ressemblants on en parlera mal,  
Et vous aurez un copie."

The pride of Armande, after the condemnation of Latourelle, knew no bounds. The sentence pronounced by the Châtelet was confirmed by the Parliament, and La Molière insisted on regarding it as a formal certificate of virtue. She resolved to place to the account of Latourelle all the errors of her own past life, all the tempests of her own stormy career. She declared that, from the very


morrow of her marriage, and throughout her life, she had always been a victim to her strange and fatal resemblance to that odious woman Latourelle. It was Latourelle who had done everything. She herself was immaculate. It was that wretch Latourelle who had been the mistress of the Abbé de Richelieu, who had fallen in love with Count de Guiche, who had intrigued successively with Lauzun, Baron, Du Boulay, and all the others, and who finally had made poor Molière die of jealousy and grief. "A sufficiently good-natured girl until then," says one of the memoir writers of the time, "La Molière now became remarkable for a haughtiness as ridiculous as it was insupportable. She assumed airs of prudery, and had always in her mouth maxims of morality and virtue."

To return now to Guérin; he, making it part of his plan to believe, or seem to believe all that Armande told him, showed himself quite ready to accept her view as to the harm which Latourelle, with her fatal resemblance, had done her. He seemed so harmless, and so absolutely, abjectly devoted to her, that La Molière thought

seriously of his proposal to marry her. There was another reason which rendered it desirable for Armande, who now piqued herself on her virtue, to have a husband to show.

Accordingly, in order to conceal the precise date of the marriage, it was resolved to celebrate it secretly, and La Molière now changed her illustrious name for that of Guérin. According to one of the numerous epigrams which this marriage could not fail to call forth, Armande rather liked Guérin, or at least liked him better than Molière. One was within her comprehension, the other beyond and above it.

But the second husband, with all his inferiority, knew at least how to govern a wife. They had not been married more than a week when the most amiable of lovers became the most tyrannical of husbands. Guérin avenged Molière. He is said to have gone so far as even to beat the beautiful, the fascinating, the irresistible Célimène. It has been suggested that at such a moment she must have regretted Alceste; though she may really have preferred the rascal who beat her to the great man who in all things was her



slave. Of all the husbands led by the Wife of Bath from the altar to the grave, the only one she really cared for was the man who on her well-thumped ribs

“Left tokens of his love in black and blue.”

The joyous days of Armande were over now that Guérin was master of her fate. No more *fêtes*, no more parties of pleasure, no banquets or entertainments of any kind. She had to obey Guérin, and he had told her that she must give up all coquettishness. At first she made some objections, but he was stronger than she was, and when he had once proved it she had to give in.

He so reformed her conduct, we are told, that at last she did not dare to receive anyone without his permission. As, however, she could not live without admiration, she resigned herself, for want of anything better, to the attentions of a man named Aubrey who lived in her house. Guérin, however, soon got wind of this intrigue, and Aubrey was turned out. Unable to escape the watchfulness of her persecutor, Armande was obliged at last to sink into the position of a

model wife. From this time, say the brothers Parfait, "her conduct was exemplary." Having retired to Meudon, where she had a charming country house, she there devoted herself entirely to the education of the son she had had by Guérin, and whom she loved with passion. Armande's stormy life seems to have had no injurious effect upon her talent. She remained the best actress of her time; and there was not a work of Molière's in which she did not play the principal part with success. Until her retirement from the stage, she continued to act the parts which her husband had composed for her, and in which, throughout her career, no one but herself had appeared. She it was who always impersonated Léonore in *L'Ecole des Maris*, Orphise in *Les Fâcheux*, Elise in *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*, Célimène in *Le Misanthrope*, Elmire in *Tartufe*, Alcmène in *Amphitryon*, Élise in *L'Avare*, Henriette in *Les Femmes Savantes*, and Angélique in *Georges Dandin*.

On 14th October 1694 Armande retired from the stage with a pension of one thousand francs. From this time the writers of the period take

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no notice of her. She came but seldom to Paris, and was almost forgotten when, on 30th November 1700, she died.

Of Armande's three children by Molière only one survived the father: his daughter Madeleine, who, finding herself unmarried at the age of twenty, and seeing that her mother took no steps towards marrying, allowed herself to be carried off by a man of forty, a widower with four children, Rachel de Montalant by name. Armande wished to take legal proceedings, but her friends interfered, and the fugitives got married, and went to live at Auteuil. Molière's daughter, the last of his children, died childless in 1723, so that the great comic dramatist left no posterity.

Fifteen years after Molière's death, a biography of his widow was published anonymously, under the title *La Fameuse Comédienne*, which was for some time, without much probability, attributed to La Fontaine. The "fable-bearer" was one of Molière's best friends. But the unflattering account of his friend's wife was explained, with too much ingenuity, by the supposition that, unable to deny her misconduct, he had taken such a lenient view

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of it as only friendship could have dictated. It is from this work that most of my particulars in regard to the life of Armande Bédard have been taken.

It was ultimately discovered that *La Fameuse Comédienne* was the work of a certain Mme. Boudin, an actress of no reputation, but who seems to have been on intimate terms with the famous comic actress, whose life she relates with only too much detail. This scandalmonger published her book in 1708, at Frankfort, having sold the MS. to a bookseller named Rottenberg. In Paris its publication would have been stopped.

## ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR.

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### CHAPTER I.

THE name of Adrienne Lecouvreur, according to the prediction uttered by her lover in the play, will be remembered as long as that of Maurice de Saxe is not forgotten. It would be difficult, moreover, to dissociate her memory from that of Voltaire, who refers in *Candide* to the disgraceful circumstances of her burial, who published immediately after the interment an indignant letter on the subject, and who, when called to account for his vehemence, said that it was "at least pardonable in a man who had been her admirer, her friend, her lover, and who, moreover, was a poet." She died in Voltaire's arms—with



her eyes, it was said, fixed on the bust of Marshal Saxe.

When Candide, in the chapter where Candide, Pangloss and Martin go to the theatre, asks the stranger who gives such valuable information about the French stage, how great actresses are treated in France, he replies that they are "adored when they are beautiful, and thrown into the gutter when they are dead;" and such an effect did the insulting treatment of poor Adrienne's remains have upon the brave Marshal that, fearing a similar fate for himself as a Lutheran Protestant, he directed in his will that his body should be consumed in quicklime.

Adrienne Lecouvreur's chief distinction as an actress consists in her having introduced on the French stage a simpler and more natural style of enunciation than that of the actresses preceding her, whose delivery of verse is said to have been too rhythmical and too emphatic. In tragedy she spoke her lines with less regard for rhyme and more for reason. She possessed all the personal qualities necessary, or at least desirable for success on the stage; and besides being witty, she was

intelligent in the highest sense of the word, and possessed a noble disposition.

These advantages she did not owe to birth—certainly not to her immediate parentage; for her father was a hat-maker, while her mother is spoken of as the near relation of a washerwoman. The hat-maker, who had previously been exercising his trade in the provinces, came to Paris and established himself in the neighbourhood of the Comédie Française. Whether under the influence of the *genus loci*, or from a desire to imitate the actors and actresses who from day to day she must have seen, little Adrienne accustomed herself from an early age to act plays, and scenes from plays, with her young companions. Adrienne's talent was soon noticed by an inferior actor named Legrand, who, after teaching her some of the tricks of the trade, procured an engagement for her somewhere in Alsace. It was in the provinces that she formed her style, and for so long a time did she wander about from theatre to theatre that she was already twenty-seven years of age when an engagement was offered to her at the Théâtre Français. Here she was equally successful in

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tragedy, and in comedy, though in the latter line her impersonations seem to have been chiefly confined to high comedy. Thus one of her best parts was that of Célimène in the *Misanthrope*.

Many authors and critics were offended by Adrienne's style, which, being full of nature, they declared to be wanting in dignity. Voltaire, greatly as he admired her, seems himself to have objected for a time to a delivery which sacrificed the mechanism of his verse. But he soon became convinced that no one could represent his heroines as they were represented by the newcomer; and he ended by regarding Adrienne Lecouvreur as the greatest actress who had appeared on the French stage.

Adrienne was well acquainted with Voltaire when Count Maurice de Saxe, one of the innumerable natural children of Augustus II., King of Poland—Carlyle's Augustus the Strong—came to try his fortune in Paris. This was in the year 1720. In the first instance he met with no luck, and had to wait a considerable time before he could get a simple regiment. "Although he was scarcely twenty-four years of age," says the author

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of a finely written Prize Essay which chance has brought beneath my notice, "Maurice had already made eleven campaigns and repudiated one wife. He joined," continues the prize essayist, "to the strength of his father the uncultured youth and fiery disposition of a sort of nomad, somewhat like our Du Guesclin, whom ladies used to call the wild boar. Under the guise of a Sarmatian, Adrienne discovered the hero, and undertook to polish the soldier. She was then thirty years of age, and had gained the experience and the passion which render a woman alike skilful to please and prompt to love."

The prize essayist then tells us, rather happily, that, under the "sweet tuition" of Adrienne, "the Achilles of Homer became the Achilles of Racine." She, moreover, "adorned his mind without softening it. . . . She made him acquainted with our language and our literature, she inspired him with a taste for poetry, music, and all the arts, together with that passion for the theatre which followed him even to the field. It may be said of the Victor of Fontenoy and his fair preceptress that she taught him everything except war, which he

knew better than anyone, and spelling, which he never knew at all: to the great loss of the French Academy, which, without this failing, would have reckoned him among its members."

A word may here be said as to the generosity of the Marshal, who on several occasions lent his travelling company of actors and actresses—his war company, one might fairly call it—to the enemy. War in those days was a less serious affair than it has since become; and life in time of peace being probably much duller than at present, commanders were never in any hurry to bring a campaign to an end. Frederick the Great, in his *Conseils aux Officiers*, tells an instructive anecdote of Marshal Luxemburg in the Low Countries, who, when his son observed to him that by taking one more town the campaign might be terminated, replied: "Silence, silly boy. Do you want us to go home and plant cabbages?"

Maurice and Adrienne had been devoted to one another for five years, when the sincerity of Adrienne's affection was put to a rude test. Peter the Great's niece, the dowager Duchess of Courland, invited Maurice de Saxe to share with her

the sovereignty of this principality, on condition that he gave her his hand; and he at once became filled with the dream of supporting the Duchess's claim against the opposition of the neighbouring powers. The romantic character of the project tempted him, on the one hand, but, on the other, he was restrained by that "want of pence" by which in his time, as in ours, public men have so often been "vexed." In vain did he appeal to his friends. Their money was all invested; or they had themselves demands to meet. In any case, they had nothing to spare.

Then it was that Adrienne Lecouvreur came to the assistance of the friend whom she equally loved and admired. She resolved to equip him as well as she could for his desperate enterprise; though she well knew, as one of the first conditions of the scheme, that if he succeeded, she would lose him for ever. But her love was wholly disinterested; and to raise for him all the money she could command, this devoted woman pledged or sold all her plate and all her jewellery; thus realising for him a sum of forty thousand francs.

Maurice distinguished himself by a bravery and a rashness worthy of Charles XII. But, attacked by the Russians, proscribed by the Poles, abandoned by his own father, and at last repudiated by the very people in whose interest he had acted, he was obliged to retire.

Even the royal widow, irritated by his numerous infidelities, would have nothing to say to him.

His enterprise," says the prize essayist, "began in the manner of the ancients, came to an end in the manner of the moderns. The demi-god took to flight, and a few newspaper articles formed his only *Iliad*."

The third of Adrienne Lecouvreur's admirers was Count d'Argental, who loved her till death, and for many years afterwards, until he himself died; but who, though his friendship was fully appreciated, does not seem to have met with any response to his passion.

The Count's mother, Madame de Ferriol, was so much alarmed by her son's love for the actress that she had resolved to send him to St Domingo, so as to place him well beyond the seductions of the enchantress. No such precaution, however, was necessary.

Madame de Ferriol feared that her son would make Adrienne an offer of marriage, and felt sure that in such a case the proposal would be accepted. Becoming acquainted with the circumstances of the case, Adrienne lost no time in writing to Madame de Ferriol a letter which placed her at rest in regard to her son's happiness, and more especially in regard to the actress' supposed designs upon him. Strangely enough, this letter was not seen by the Count himself until long after the death of his mother and of Adrienne herself. He found it by chance among some of his mother's papers, when he was in his eighty-fifth year, and as much attached to Adrienne's memory as in his young days he had been to Adrienne herself. Here is the letter, which in no account of Adrienne Lecouvreur ought to be forgotten:—

“PARIS, 22d March 1721.

“MADAME,—I do not learn without being much pained of your anxiety, and of the prospects with which this anxiety has inspired you. I might add that I have been equally grieved by hearing that

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you blame my conduct; but I write to you less to justify it than to protest to you that for the future, in all that regards you, it shall be such as you may wish to prescribe. I had asked permission to see you last Tuesday, with the view of speaking to you in confidence, and asking you for your commands. But your manner of receiving me destroyed my ardour, and in your presence I found myself only depressed and sad. It is necessary, however, that you should know my true sentiments, and, if you will allow me to add something else, that you should not disdain to listen to my very humble remonstrances, if you do not wish to lose your son. He is the most respectful, the most honourable young man I have ever met in my life. How you would admire him if he did not belong to you! Once again, madame, deign to join with me in destroying the weakness which irritates you, but in which I have no part, whatever you may say. Do not treat him with contempt or with harshness. I would rather take upon myself all his hatred, in spite of the tender friendship, the veneration I entertain for him, than expose him to the least temptation which might cause him to

fail in respect towards you. You are too much interested in curing him not to be anxious to attain your object. But your very eagerness renders you unable to attain it without aid, above all, when you seek to put an end to his love by an attitude of authority, and by painting me in disadvantageous colours, whether true or not. His passion must indeed be an exceptional one, since it has existed so long a time without hope, in the midst of disappointments, in spite of the voyages you have made him undertake, and of eight months' stay in Paris, during which he never saw me, at least not in my house, and when he had no reason to believe that I should ever receive him again. I thought he was cured, and for that reason consented to see him during my last illness. It is easy to believe that his society would give me infinite pleasure but for this unhappy passion, which astonishes as much it flatters me, and of which I refuse to take advantage. You think that if he sees me he will depart from duty, and you push this fear to such a point as to take violent resolutions against him. In truth, madame, it is not just that he should be rendered unhappy in

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so many ways. Add nothing to any severity of mine; seek rather to console him. Make all his resentment fall upon me, and let him find consolation in your kindness.

“I will write to him whatever you please; I will never see him again if you desire it; I will even go away into the country if you consider it necessary. But do not threaten to send him to the end of the world. He may be useful to his country; he will be the delight of his friends; he will fill you with satisfaction and glory. All you need do is to guide his talents, and let his virtues act for themselves. Forget for a time that you are his mother, if this character is in any way opposed to the kindness which, on my knees, I beg you to show him. Finally, madame, I would rather retire from the world, or love him with the love of passion, than allow him any more to be tormented for me, or by me. Grant your forgiveness to a feeling which you can destroy, but upon which I can have no effect. Add what I now beg of you to all the other acts of kindness with which you have loaded me, and allow me to think that my sincere attachment and my

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lively gratitude will oblige you to preserve for me the kindly feeling which I so much value; and permit me to congratulate myself, throughout life, on being, with profound respect, madame, your very humble and very obedient servant,

“ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR.

“*P.S.*—Let me know what you wish me to do; and if you desire to speak to me without his knowing it, I will meet you wherever you please, madame, and will spare no pains, no efforts, in order that you may be satisfied both with your son and with me.”

It has been already mentioned that Count d'Argental saw this letter for the first time when he was eighty-four years of age. He came upon it by accident in an old desk of his mother's, and it may well be believed that on reading it he burst into tears. He had remained through life the friend of the woman who, while sincerely attached to him, had refused him her love. On her deathbed she had appointed him her sole executor; and although he was at the time

one of the councillors of the Parliament of Paris, he had the manliness to undertake the trust.

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## CHAPTER II.

AN incident but little known in the life of Adrienne Lecouvreur is chronicled by the prize essayist to whose paper I have so often referred. A young man, who had been sent to Paris by his family with a view to study, saw Adrienne Lecouvreur on the stage, and fell so passionately in love with her that he neglected everything for her sake, and spent more time and money than he could afford in going to the theatre the nights she played. At last, in despair, he enlisted, and soon afterwards deserted. He was captured, condemned to death, and was about to be shot, when Adrienne, being made aware of the part she had unwittingly played in the affair, interceded for him, and so effectively that she saved his life. "So powerful,"

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says the prize essayist, "is a fine soul in a fine woman."

Besides being idolised by the public, Adrienne Lecouvreur was much esteemed in private life, many ladies of high rank receiving her who, as a rule, would have avoided the society of an actress.

"It has become the fashion," writes Adrienne, in a letter dated May 5th, 1728, "to dine or sup with me now that a few duchesses have done me this honour." Her house was, moreover, the rendezvous of all the notabilities of the day, whether in literature, arms, or the administration.

Adrienne Lecouvreur was carried off, after a short and somewhat mysterious illness, on 20th March 1730. So sudden was her death that the public, who adored her, would not believe that it arose from natural causes; and the Duchess de Bouillon, known to be her rival and her implacable enemy, was declared by everyone to be her murderess. According to the story current at the time, she owed her death to a box of poisoned sweetmeats, treacherously presented to her; though

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Scribe and Legouv  , in their well-known play, make her die from the effect of a poisoned bouquet given to her by the Duchess, in feigned admiration of her genius. All that is really known on the subject is to be found in the *Memoirs* of the Abb   Annillon, the *Letters* of Mdlle. Aiss  , and a note appended to one of these letters by Voltaire himself.

The popular version of the incidents of Adrienne's death was as follows: One night, it was said, when she was playing the part of Ph  dre, she saw in one of the boxes close to the stage the Duchess de Bouillon, who, she knew, was endeavouring to replace her in the affections of Count de Saxe; and the sight of this woman made her deliver with exceptional energy these indignant lines,—

“Je sais mes perfidies  
C  none, et ne suis pas de ces femmes hardies  
Qui, go  tant dans la crime une tranquille paix  
Ont su se faire un front qui ne rougit jamais.”

As the Duchess de Bouillon, according to Mdlle. Aiss  , was “capricious, violent, impulsive, and much addicted to love affairs, her tastes extending from the prince to the actor,” she might well be con-

sidered one of these women stigmatised first by the poet, and afterwards, through the poet's words, by the actress. It may readily be believed, too, that Adrienne made every point tell, so that the Duchess, brazen-faced as she might be, would feel wounded to the quick. So appropriate were the verses, and so clear was the intention of the much-loved actress in applying them, that the audience, in full sympathy with her, applauded with the wildest enthusiasm.

Mdlle. Aïssé says nothing of this scene—a scene within a scene—in her letter on the subject of Adrienne Lecouvreur's death. But it had passed into a tradition long before M. Legouvé seized upon it as the nucleus of the drama which he composed in collaboration with Scribe. Mdlle. Aïssé tells us, in the first place, that “the Duchess de Bouillon conceived a fancy for Count de Saxe, who had none for her. Not that he piques himself,” she continues, “on his fidelity to Lecouvreur, who, for a long time past has been the true object of his affection, for, together with his passion for her, he has had a thousand little passing tastes. But he was in no way anxious to reply to the impulsiveness



of Mme. de Bouillon, who was indignant at seeing her charms despised, and who had no doubt that Lecouvreur was the obstacle that stood in the way of the passion which the Count would otherwise naturally entertain for her. To destroy the obstacle, she resolved to get rid of the actress. She had some lozenges made in order to carry out her horrible design, and chose a young Abbé\* with whom she was not personally acquainted to be the instrument of her vengeance. This Abbé had a talent for painting. He was addressed by two men in the Tuileries Gardens, who proposed to him, after a long conversation which turned upon his poverty and his skill in painting, that he should manage to call upon Lecouvreur, and get her to eat some lozenges which would be given to him. The poor Abbé expatiated on the blackness of such a crime; but the two men replied that it no longer depended upon him to execute it or not, for that if he refused, his own life would be taken. The Abbé, in his fear, promised everything. He was taken to

\* In *La Bastille Dévoilée*, among the names of the persons confined in 1730 is given that of the Abbé Bouret, "for the affair of the Duchess de Bouillon and Lecouvreur the actress."

Mme. de Bouillon, who repeated the promises and menaces previously made to him, and then gave him the lozenges. The Abbé begged that a few days might be allowed him for executing the project. Soon afterwards Mdle. Lecouvreur, returning home with one of our friends and an actress named Lamothe, received an anonymous letter, in which she was begged to come as soon as possible, either alone or with someone in whom she had confidence, to the Luxembourg Gardens, where, at the fifth tree of the main avenue, she would find a man who had something of the last importance to tell her. As she had only just time to keep this appointment, she returned to her carriage, accompanied by the two persons who had been with her when the letter was delivered. She found the Abbé waiting for her, and on accosting her he told her of the odious commission with which he had been entrusted, adding that he was incapable of committing such a crime, but that he was in a great difficulty inasmuch as he was sure to be assassinated.

“Lecouvreur told him that, for the safety of both, the whole affair must be denounced to the lieu-

tenant of police. The Abbé replied that he feared that if he did such a thing he might create enemies who would be too powerful for him to resist, but that, even at the peril of his life, he was prepared to maintain what he had asserted. Lecouvreur took him at once in her carriage to M. Hérault, who, hearing the statement of facts, asked the Abbé for the lozenges, and threw one of them to a dog, which died a quarter of an hour afterwards. He then asked him which of the two Bouillons had given him this commission; and when the Abbé replied that it was the Duchess, he showed himself in no way surprised.

“M. Hérault continued to question him, and asked him if he would venture to support his assertion publicly, when the Abbé replied that he could put him in prison, and afterwards confront him with Mme. de Bouillon. The lieutenant of police sent them all away, and then told the Cardinal of the whole affair. The Cardinal was much irritated, and desired, in the first instance, that the affair might be proceeded with in all severity. But the relations and friends of the

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Bouillon family persuaded him not to give publicity to so scandalous an affair.

"Some months afterwards, no one knows how, the story was made public, when it caused the greatest excitement. Mme. de Bouillon's brother-in-law spoke of it to his brother, telling him that his wife must absolutely clear herself from such a suspicion, and that he ought to obtain a *lettre de cachet* in order to shut the Abbé up. There was no difficulty in obtaining the *lettre de cachet*, and the unhappy man was arrested and taken to the Bastille. He was examined, when he maintained with firmness all that he had said. Both promises and threats were employed to make him deny his statement. It was suggested to him that he could explain it by accusing himself of madness, or of having formed such a passion for Lecouvreur that, in order to please her, he had at her suggestion invented the fable. But nothing could move him, and he was kept in prison.

"Then Lecouvreur wrote to the Abbé's father. He lived in the country, and had not heard of his son's misfortune. The poor man came at once to Paris, and begged that his son might

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either be brought to trial or set at liberty. He addressed himself to the Cardinal, who asked Mme. de Bouillon whether she wished the affair to be brought to trial, as otherwise the Abbé must be released. Mme. de Buillon, fearing publicity, and unable to get the Abbé assassinated in the Bastille, consented to his liberation. During the two months that the father remained in Paris nothing happened to the son; but when the father had gone back to the country, the Abbé, having been imprudent enough to remain in Paris, suddenly disappeared. No one knows whether he is dead or not, but he is no longer seen.

“Since then Lecouvreur has been on her guard. One day, at the theatre, after the principal piece, Mme. de Bouillon sent for her to come to her box. Lecouvreur was extremely surprised, and answered that her toilette was incomplete, and that she could not present herself. The Duchess sent a second time, when she was told, in reply to the second invitation, that she was about to appear on the stage, and that though the Duchess might forgive her if she delayed doing so, the public would not. She added that she would

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visit Mme. de Bouillon after the act, and Mme. de Bouillon sent her back word that she would expect her. When the interview took place, Mme. de Bouillon complimented and caressed her, telling her that her acting had been admirable, and that she had been delighted to see her play the part so well. Some time afterwards Lecouvreur found herself so ill in the middle of the act that she was unable to continue her part.

When the public was informed of this there was a general cry to know whether Lecouvreur was getting better. But from that time she fell away with dreadful rapidity. The last time she appeared to the public she played the part of Jocasta in the *Œdipe* of Voltaire. Before she began she suffered so much with an attack of dysentery that she was obliged again and again to desist from playing. It was pitiful to see her exhausted condition; and though I did not know what was the matter with her, I spoke two or three times of her pitiable state to Mme. de Parabère. After the first piece, when we had learned the nature of her indisposition, we were much surprised to see her reappear in the sub-

sequent piece, *La Florentin*, undertaking a very long and very difficult part, which she nevertheless played to perfection, so that she seemed to take pleasure in it herself. The public showed itself very much obliged to her for continuing her performance, and it was no longer said, as it had been previously, that she was suffering from the effects of poison. The poor creature went home, and four days afterwards, at one o'clock in the afternoon, when it was thought that she was getting better, she had convulsions, which never happens in cases of dysentery. She went out like a candle. The body was opened, and the bowels were found to be ulcerated. . . .

"If the suspected lady had shown herself at the theatre, in the circumstances, she would have been driven from the house. She had the audacity to send every day to Lecouvreur's residence to hear how she was getting on. Lecouvreur has appointed d'Argental the executor of her will; and, rising above the fear of ridicule, he has accepted the charge, for which all sensible persons applaud him. M. Berthier says that he has behaved exceedingly well, and that an honest man

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ought never to miss an opportunity of doing good. You can rest assured of all I have told you. It comes to me from one of Lecouvreur's female friends."

Voltaire, on the other hand, wrote in a manuscript note appended to Mdle. Aïssé's narrative:—"She died between my arms, of inflammation of the bowels, and it was I who caused the body to be opened. All that Mdle. Aïssé says on the subject is mere popular rumour, without any foundation."

If the French clergy objected generally to bury actors and actresses with religious rites, they were scarcely likely to make an exception in favour of an actress who had died in the arms of Voltaire. Her body, then, was thrown "à la voirie," as the author of *Candide* puts it; or, to be exact, was buried somewhere on the banks of the Seine, in the neighbourhood of a wharf, the interment being made secretly and at midnight, as though poor Adrienne had been a criminal.

The Abbé Languet, Curé of Saint-Sulpice, the parish to which Adrienne Lecouvreur belonged, after taking the orders of the Archbishop, had refused to



admit her body to the cemetery, and all hope of a Christian burial was then abandoned. The same evening, on the order of the lieutenant of police, the actress's remains were carried from her house, 21 Rue des Marais-Saint-Germain (the house where Racine died, and where Mdle. Clairon was afterwards to live), placed in a hackney coach, and, accompanied by two torch-bearers, and by M. de Laubinière, a friend of the deceased, carried to La Grenouillère (where afterwards stood the Rue de Bourgogne), and there buried under guard of a night patrol.

This severity of the clergy towards the corpse, this refusal of ordinary burial to the inanimate body of a distinguished and benevolent woman, of an actress adored by the public, excited much comment, but no one dared protest. The intolerance of the Archbishop, and of the priests who had applied to him for instructions, provoked, however, from Voltaire some indignant verses, beginning as follows:—

“Ah, verrai-je toujours ma faible nation  
Incertaine en ses vœux, flétrir ce qu'elle admire ;  
Nos mœurs avec nos lois toujours se contredire ;  
Et le Français volage endormi sous l'empire  
De la superstition ?” \*

\* Voltaire, “Œuvres Complètes” (Beuchot), vol. xii. p. 30.

Voltaire, in writing the poem from which the above stanza is quoted, had simply obeyed his own natural impulse. His verses were not intended for publication, for he knew that if they were seen by the clergy, they might get him once more into trouble. He simply sent a copy of the poem to his friend Thiériot, and perhaps to others with a strong recommendation to keep it secret. The first thing, however, that Thiériot seems to have done was to take Voltaire's verses with him into society, where he was always received in the character of "Voltaire's friend." The poet had probably exaggerated the danger. The clergy could have no wish to reawaken the scandal caused by the circumstances of Adrienne Lecouvreur's burial; and though Voltaire left Paris when he found that his poem on the death of Adrienne was being circulated everywhere in manuscript, there does not seem to have been any necessity for this species of flight.

The place of Adrienne's burial, which long remained unknown, was discovered years afterwards, during some work of excavation and

demolition. Voltaire and Maurice de Saxe were both dead; but the faithful d'Argental was still living, and he hastened to mark the spot by a tablet to her memory.

# MADAME FAVART.

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## CHAPTER I.

IN 1745 the engagement of actors and actresses at the Opéra Comique of Paris was a duty entrusted to Charles Simon Favart, in recognition of the skill which he had exhibited in theatrical management, and of the fame which he had acquired as a writer for the stage. It was in his official capacity that he made the acquaintance of Mdlle. Duronceray, who was afterwards to become his wife, and, under his name, famous both in her own generation and in ours. On the 21st January 1745, Mme. Duronceray, the wife of a musician of King Stanislas, wrote from Lunéville to offer M. Favart the services of herself and daughter as actresses and dancers. The young

1745

director accepted the proposition. Soon afterwards Mdlle. Duronceray came to Paris, and, under the name of Chantilly, appeared at the Opéra Comique in a piece from M. Favart's pen, entitled *Les Fêtes Publiques*. Her beauty and her vocal and dramatic talents transported the audience, and captivated the author himself. Ere long M. Favart confessed to the actress the passion with which she had inspired him, and to this passion he found a response. A man of the highest honour, he did not attempt to abuse his official position, by taking advantage of the dependence of a young girl, whose engagement was in his hands. On 10th December in the same year he married her, and the following letter which he wrote to her before the marriage sufficiently proves the delicacy and nobility of the sentiments which she had excited within him:—

“Take care of your health, my dear Justine; remember that it concerns the whole public, and that mine is involved in it. You will take more care of yourself if you have any regard for me, who love you better than life; though do not

take offence, for my very sentiments are your eulogy. Your talents, it is true, seduce me, but your virtue binds me. If your thoughts were not such as your actions indicate, you would be unworthy of my esteem and of my love. Continue to justify my admiration for you by always preserving that discretion which you have by nature, and which is so rare in persons of your talent. Virtue does not shine until it is exposed, and the perils by which you are surrounded lend a new lustre to yours. I am speaking to you against the interests of my heart, but I at the same time prove to you that I am the sincerest and best of your friends.

FAVART."

It has been said that the marriage took place in December 1745. The interval of courtship, however, was marked by events which must not be passed over. In 1745 the Opéra Comique, as an establishment recognised and subventioned by the government, was suppressed; and Favart, left without a theatre, could only succeed in obtaining permission to give representations at a minor house, where, however, he found it impossible

to carry out his ideas. Just then he got married.

Favart had some time before made the acquaintance of Marshal Saxe, who may be said to have played almost as great a part in connection with the stage as with the camp; and he was now invited by the famous commander to organise a company for giving performances at his headquarters, and for the entertainment of the army in Flanders generally. The company was already in existence; but as it was under the direction of one of Favart's friends, M. Parmentier, the Marshal's invitation was declined. Determined to secure the services of Favart, the Count de Saxe now proposed that the actual company, which was too numerous, should be divided into two, and that Favart should take charge of one of the two sections.

Favart, in his *Memoirs*, tells us that he received at this time from Marshal Saxe the following letter:—

“Having heard so much in your favour, I have chosen you in preference to all others, in order

to give you the exclusive management of my comedy company. I am convinced that you will do your utmost to render it successful; but do not imagine that I look upon it simply as a means of amusement. It enters into my political views, and into the plan of my military operations. I will tell you what you will have to do in this respect when the moment arrives. Meanwhile, I reckon on your discretion and your punctuality. You are from this moment at liberty to make all your arrangements for opening your theatre at Brussels in the month of April next."

Marshal Saxe's letter had no sooner reached Favart than he hurried to Brussels in order to secure a suitable building, after which he returned to Paris to engage the necessary actors and actresses. Then he returned to Brussels with his wife. The company was numerous and well-composed. It included performers for every kind of work. But it still was not all that Favart desired. He complained that he had not sufficient time to do things thoroughly. Yet the



first performances were very successful, and gave general satisfaction.

Favart had only been two days at Brussels when Marshal Saxe arrived, and the same afternoon he gave an entertainment to the ladies whose husbands were serving on his staff, and to the wives generally of the officers. Favart wrote an impromptu for the occasion, and was invited to the dinner, where he was asked on all sides what a poet like himself could find to do in the wars? He replied that he had come in order to celebrate the exploits of the French, and to satirise the enemy.

The entertainment offered by the Marshal to his guests consisted of performances by the Highland contingent, whose scanty costumes are said to have scandalised the ladies, but, at the same time, to have provoked their smiles. Then a piece was played, and with so much success that, from that time, it became the fashion to attend the Favart representations whenever they were given.

Marshal Saxe had told Favart that it was part of his policy to give theatrical entertainments, and the manager soon saw that his comedies interested

the officers sufficiently to take them away from cards and dice, to which, previously, they had given themselves up with only too much devotion.

As to the effect which, according to Marshal Saxe, theatrical performances might have in promoting the success of his military operations, Favart tells us that Marshal Saxe, understanding well the French character, knew that a lively couplet, a few happy lines, would have more effect on his soldiers than the most eloquent harangues. "He had appointed me song writer to the army, and it was part of my duty to celebrate, in my own manner, the most important incidents of the campaign." In September 1747, Favart had constructed a theatre in the market-place of Tongres. A decisive action was daily expected, but this did not prevent the general officers assembled in the town, nor the others who were cantoned in the neighbourhood, from coming regularly to the play, which thus became a military rendezvous. "On 9th October, at two o'clock in the afternoon, I was sent for by the Marshal. When I arrived he sent away all who were within talking to him, and said to me

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alone: 'To-morrow I shall give battle. Nothing is yet known on the subject. Announce it this evening at the end of the performance, in couplets suitable to the occasion. Until then let nothing whatever transpire.' I acted in accordance with the Marshal's orders, and naturally my couplets caused universal surprise. Officers hurried to the general's box, thinking that I had committed myself, that my announcement was without authorisation. He confirmed, however, what I had just announced, and the house now resounded with applause. On all sides but two words were heard, 'Demain bataille!' The intoxication of joy passed rapidly from the officers to the soldiers, and was so intense that one could not but see therein a presage of victory. I announced a cessation of the performance for three days, but on the very morrow of the battle our troops were impatient for another representation. It was for me to celebrate the victory, and there was ample basis for my eulogies. I composed in the morning two or three scenes which were played the same night. I did not confine myself to bestowing sickly praise on our own troops. I also spoke of the

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bravery shown by the enemy, finishing with these verses:—

‘Anglais chéris de la Victoire  
Vous ne cédez q’aux seuls Français ;  
Vous n’en avez pas moins de gloire.’”

The members of M. Favart's company found themselves frequently in dangerous positions. It was impossible to reckon with the enemy, and occasionally the foe appeared in the most unexpected places, and at the most unexpected times. An amusing story is told of Mdlle. Grimaldi, a dancer, who, in company with several actors, was surprised by a party of hussars. Her friends had already been plundered, and might soon have been massacred, had she not covered her face with the skirt of her dress, and called out in pathetic tones that the enemy might take her for a victim, if her unfortunate companions were only spared.

In a few months, meanwhile, the reputation of M. Favart and his company had spread so far that the enemy desired in its turn to witness the performances; and passports having been sent to Favart by the Duke of Lorraine and of Bar, he

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found himself at liberty to give representations alternately in the two camps. Here, again, Marshal Saxe turned Favart's company to political account. Its representations were so much enjoyed by the enemy that a better feeling between the contending powers was gradually brought about, and in 1748 peace was concluded.

The state of war, however, was in those days almost continuous, and Favart's occupation as war manager was soon to be renewed. He gives in his letters strange accounts of the savagery with which the soldiers on both sides behaved. At one time a Frenchman attached to the army is made prisoner, and six days afterwards sent back to Marshal Saxe's camp with nothing on but his breeches and his shirt. At another, a hundred hussars on the French side pretend to be the enemy, in which character they plunder their own people, but, being recognised and surrounded, are made prisoners, and very justly hanged. Favart tells a story, at once horrible and grotesque, of five grenadiers who fought for the possession of a female camp follower, and with such ferocity that soon four of them lay dead on the ground. The

survivor, instead of profiting by his dearly bought victory, looked at the woman with well-merited contempt, and exclaiming, "Wretch, you have caused the death of four of my comrades!" cut her head open with his sabre.

Favart himself had some narrow escapes; but danger and hard living seem to have had no injurious effect upon his health. At times, however, the position of the manager was really a trying one. He speaks, in a letter to his mother, of having been three days and three nights without sleep, except such as he could get leaning against the trunk of a tree, with his feet in water. The Marshal continued meanwhile to assure him that he would never allow him to regret his war services.

The only people who made money during the war were, according to Favart, the suttlers, who, nevertheless, were plundered by the hussars.

On one occasion Favart was under the protection of an escort of thirty infantry when an attack was made by a hundred and twenty of the enemy's hussars. Twice the light cavalry were repulsed, but their numbers were too great; and

in the end, of the thirty infantry only six escaped alive. The rest lay dead on the soil.

"The least wounded of these six," writes Favart, "had received four sabre cuts. Never did I see a man of such courage. He was covered with blood, which he was losing in abundance, and yet would not allow his wounds to be dressed until he had done all he could in the way of fighting. Even then he was obliged, in order to make himself understood, to hold up his nose and a portion of his cheek, separated from the rest of his countenance by a sabre cut. The hussars were still prancing about in our neighbourhood at the distance of a long gun-shot. But as we were now escorted by a hundred infantry soldiers, they did not venture to come to close quarters.

"I prefer," concludes Favart, "moderate profits with safety to a large fortune purchased by continual fear and danger."

During his theatrical campaigns (the words being here used in their literal sense) Favart used to gain as much as six hundred francs (£24) a day.

Among the horrors witnessed by Favart in the

course of his war experiences, he speaks in particular of "an execution which is a disgrace to humanity. Yesterday," he says, "we took the the port of St Philippe, when five hundred men were hanged." In an account of a famous battle fought against an army composed of English, Hanoverians, Hessians, Dutch and Austrians, Favart tells us that the enemy's left, composed of English, Hanoverians and Hessians, held out all day with desperate courage, but had at last to succumb. But the right," he adds, "did not await our fire. The Austrians and the Dutch dispersed without firing one shot. The remainder of the English, to the number of ten thousand, after defending themselves for three hours in a village to which they had been driven, tried to escape across the marshes, but, meeting the army of the Count de Clermont, which they had not expected, were done for.

"A simple carbineer captured the English General, Ligonier, which is as though Marshal Saxe himself had been taken, supposing the comparison to be admissible. The soldier led the general by a bridle to the King. A moment

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afterwards the Duke of Cumberland was also taken."

All this time Favart's wife had been a member of the war company, playing under her stage name of Chantilly. Marshal Saxe had formed a violent passion for her, which was not diminished by the lady's determined resistance.

Alarmed by the Marshal's impetuosity, Mme. Favart decided to leave the camp, and, under the pretext of a sudden indisposition, hurried to Brussels, where she placed herself beneath the care of her patroness the Duchess de Chevreuse.

"Send me the medical certificate," wrote Favart to his wife, when he had reason to believe that she must have reached Brussels, "that I may show it to the Marshal. Theatrical gossip is circulating a report to the effect that your illness is only a piece of audacity awkwardly devised in order to conceal your fear and my jealousy. I reply that I had nothing to be jealous of, and that to suspect you is to insult you. M. de la Grollet is to be consulted as to whether you are in a fit state to join the army, and the threat

has even been made that you shall be brought on here by grenadiers, and that I shall be punished for having invented the story of your illness. I care little for these menaces myself, but I can scarcely forgive myself for having exposed you to such tyranny. We are very uncomfortable here. I am without a lodging, and I have slept on straw, in the open air, ever since you left. If any attempt is made to send you back, implore the assistance of the Duchess de Chevreuse. She is too just to refuse you her protection on so essential a point. The kindness with which she treats us proves that for a certainty. She may tell M. de la Grollet that your health does not permit you to make so trying a journey. Against such evidence nothing can prevail. Finally, dearest, although your presence is necessary here for the sake of the performances, and although I am burning with impatience to see you again, your health, more precious to me than all worldly interests, more dear to me than life itself, must be placed before everything. Send news of yourself as soon as possible to your dear husband,

FAVART."

Mme. Favart did not return to the army, but, on the contrary, continued her retreat from Brussels to Paris, where she lived a retired life, and gave birth to a son. M. Favart still remained with the army. But the Marshal, wounded in his love and in his vanity, withdrew his patronage, and even did worse.

As long as Brussels remained in the possession of the French troops, Favart paid to the proprietors of his theatre, in accordance with the conditions fixed by the Marshal himself, an annual rent of one hundred and fifty ducats. When, however, the conquered territory was returned to Maria Theresa, whose troops and magistrates at once entered into possession, the owners of the theatre, without any previous warning to M. Favart, obtained against him an order of arrest on the ground that he owed them a sum of money, arbitrarily fixed by themselves alone. Favart abandoned his theatrical stock, and, leaving with his stage manager a letter begging him to raise as much money as possible, and with it to pay the actors, saved himself from arrest by escaping towards the frontier. He then appealed to Marshal

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Saxe, who, instead of replying to Favart, seems to have thought it more becoming to address his beautiful wife.

"I have been informed," he wrote, "that the proprietors of the theatre are proceeding against Favart, in virtue of the decree which they obtained against him at Brussels. The best thing you can do will be, I think, to go away; and as you are not fortunately situated just now, I offer you an allowance of five hundred livres (francs), which will be paid to you every month until your affairs have taken a favourable turn. Have the kindness to let me know your decision in this matter, and the place chosen by you or by Favart for your retirement.

"You know, mademoiselle, my sentiments towards you.

M. DE SAXE."

Favart answered the Marshal's letter himself, and while thanking him for his offer, declined to accept it. He had done nothing, he said, to deserve such generosity, and it would be shameful for him to profit by the Marshal's proposition. Meanwhile

the Favarts were without money, though it was absolutely necessary for them to seek some place of retirement, since the proprietor of the theatre had obtained permission to execute the order of arrest on French territory.

A letter from Favart's mother to the Marshal produced a reply, in which Favart personally was offered employment at a distance from his wife. Meanwhile Mme. Favart had borrowed from a family friend fifty louis, which enabled the husband and wife to reach Strasburg, where for some time they lived in security, if not comfort.

Hearing after a time that the Marshal had left Paris, Mme. Favart accepted a lucrative engagement at the Comédie Italienne, whose manager was only too happy to deprive the Opéra Comique of the favourite singer who had at one time made the success of that house. A few days after her successful first appearance at the Comédie Italienne, she wrote to her husband saying that she longed to see him again, that she saw no one but his mother and sister and the people at the theatre, and that she had a letter ready for "our enemy" as soon as he arrived, in which she told

him plainly what her sentiments were towards him.

Twenty days afterwards she wrote:—

“The Marshal is still furious against me; but I do not mind. He has just written a letter to Berca-ville, in which he charges him to tell our mother that, if you come to Paris, and if she has any love for you, as he feels sure she has, she must send you away as soon as possible; and that he gave this advice as a last mark of his kindness towards you.”

“That as for Mme. Chantilly, she was worthy of no consideration; which you will not be vexed to hear. Your friends imagine that you are traveling in France by way of diversion. If you desire it, I will throw up my engagement at once, and hasten to join you. Tell me your wishes, and I will follow them from point to point. Tell me what I am to say to the members of the company, who are all expecting your arrival. There are always great houses the nights I appear. I have been playing the part of the dancer in *Je ne sais quoi*, and of Fanchon in *Le Triomphe del l'intérêt*.

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The ballet of *La Marmotte* is still being performed with success. Your couplets are always applauded. The duet which I sing with Richard is also of your writing; the mere fact that it is yours ensures my singing it well. I am threatened with all kinds of things, but I laugh at such menaces. I am ready, if needs be, to beg with you in the street.

"I have just learned from my mother and sister that the Marshal wishes to replace Mme. Rivière, and to bring this about, has sent word to me that he loves me more than ever. I can no longer, therefore, ask any favours from him.

"If it is not possible to remain here, we will go away, and end our days tranquilly in some foreign land, bound together by love and friendship.

"I am for ever your wife and sweetheart,

"JUSTINE FAVART."

Marshal Saxe, speaking of the Favarts, in more than one of his letters, treats them as silly, unreasonable people, who, being entirely without resources, will nevertheless not receive assistance at his hands. The truth seems to be that he pur-

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sued Madame Favart in every possible way, except those which he knew would affront her beyond remedy.

On one campaign Marshal Saxe is said to have been more occupied with the movements of Madame Favart, and of her husband so constantly attached to her, than of the enemy, who, nevertheless, needed careful watching at the time. "They are gone," cried the Marshal one morning to an aide-de-camp who had come to ask for instructions. "They have got away in spite of everything."

"They cannot have retired very far," answered the aide-de-camp. "They seem to be in the same position as yesterday."

"You don't know what you are talking about," returned the Marshal angrily. "They have disappeared, and heaven knows when I shall have them in my power again."

After much confusion, and a very few words of explanation, it appeared that Marshal Saxe was thinking not of the foe, whom he still held within his grasp, but of the charming singer and her provokingly faithful husband, who had, in fact, succeeded in withdrawing from the camp.



When Favart was in concealment at Strasburg, in order to avoid the judgment pronounced against him at Brussels, Marshal Saxe tracked him out through a police agent named Meunier. All he could discover about Favart was, however, that he was about to start for Lunéville, where his wife would join him; and on the pretext that she had left Fontainbleau, where she was to take part in a series of performances before the Court, without obtaining formal permission from the King, she was seized and forced to retrace her steps towards Paris. From Meaux she found time to write to her husband, who had not reached Lunéville at the moment of her arrest, the following letter:—

“Do not grieve for me. I must obey the orders of the King. I do not know where I am being taken to. To whatever tortures I may be subjected, nothing will make me give way.

“They assert that I am being taken to Fontainbleau. I embrace you, and love you.

“FAVART.”

A few days afterwards the unfortunate actress wrote from Les Grands Andelys:—

“They have brought me to the convent of Les Grands Andelys, to the Ursulines; that is to say, twenty-two leagues from Paris. I have seen the *lettre de cachet*, and am placed here with the sanction of my father. Do not lose an instant. Send all our papers to the Minister, Dargençon, and above all my father’s consent signed with his own hand. This document is in the possession of the Curé of Saint Pierre aux Bœufs. Get together our witnesses, and bring them with you to the minister. If it is my father who is persecuting us in this way, the truth will be known, and justice will be rendered to us. If our trouble is due to some of our enemies, they may do what they please. They will perhaps have influence enough to separate us for life, but they will never be able to prevent us from loving one another, nor break the sacred tie which binds together our hearts.

“I have just written to Marshal Saxe about what has happened. He has always shown us much friendship. I am sure he will interest him-

self in this matter, and do his best to render us a service.

“*P.S.*—Do not be mad enough to come and look for me here.”


From the first days of her captivity, Mme. Favart had received from Meunier, Marshal Saxe's skilful and devoted agent, letters in which he described the zeal and ardour of the Marshal in his endeavour to soften her position and to bring about her liberation. Meanwhile, her situation at the convent became worse. “I believe,” she wrote to her mother-in-law, “that they are afraid of my saying that I am not kept here by order of my father alone, and they may move me away somewhere else, to a distance of perhaps a thousand leagues. I am already eighty leagues from you. I write you this letter beforehand, in case there may be some opportunity of sending it. As regards the people at the convent, I should beg them in vain to forward it. They would do nothing of the kind. I am kept in close confinement, and have only permission to write to the police officer

who brought me here. I could not be trusted worse were I a state criminal."

Mme. Favart, be it remembered, had committed no assignable fault but that of leaving Fontainbleau while the Court performances were going on, in order to join her husband. Any liberty of this kind was treated with the greatest severity; actors and actresses who failed in their duty towards the public, or, worse still, towards the Court, being really treated, in Mme. Favart's own words, as state criminals. The *lettre de cachet*, however, under which Mme. Favart had been arrested, was one which had been procured for the express purpose of placing her in a difficulty, so that the creator of the difficulty might afterwards earn her thanks by extricating her from it. She had apparently left Fontainbleau with full permission from the theatrical authorities. Her alleged flight was only a pretext put forward by the person interested in procuring her arrest. Of this she had soon an opportunity of convincing herself, though, in answering the letter which she had sent from her convent prison to the Marshal, the relentless warrior did not fully disclose his intentions.

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"I received, just as I was starting from Chambord, the letter you wrote to me from Lunéville, my dear little woman. It caused me great anxiety, for our convent friends do not easily let go their prey. I have not yet heard anything of Favart. You are always in too great a hurry. He must feel highly flattered that you should sacrifice for him pleasure, glory, everything, in short, that might have made the happiness of your existence, in order to follow him in a style of life which necessity alone could compel anyone to embrace. I hope that he will be able to compensate you for it, and that you will never feel the sacrifice you are making. I saw yesterday evening Marshal de Richelieu, who was furious with you on account of something that M. Bérrier had whispered into his ears. He had told him that in the pit there were soldiers of the guard in disguise, who had been brought there by an officer whom you had placed in your party; that all the cabal was due to you. I replied that Coraline might well have been mixed up in it herself, and that I was sure that Rochard had had something to do with it, as I was equally sure that you had had no concern



in it, since you well said in the amphitheatre to those who were so anxious to show their zeal: 'Gentlemen, I am much obliged to you, but you do me more harm than good.' Marshal de Richelieu told me that he would have Rochard sent to prison as soon as he came back from Fontainebleau. All the injunctions at the theatres have been renewed, and it has been decided not to allow them any more to be set at naught.

"M. Bérrier and the Duke de Gêvres appear to have said that they would never allow the public to take the upper hand of the Court. This is becoming an affair of state. Meanwhile, I ward off all the blows that might fall upon you. I have no more to say to you about myself personally. You would not make my happiness and your own. Perhaps you will make your own unhappiness and that of Favart. I do not wish it, but I fear it.

"Farewell.

M. DE SAXE."

Although many writers of the period seem inclined to think that the Marshal's strategy was at last crowned with success, there is no evidence

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in support of their belief; while Mme. Favart's own letters seem entirely to contradict it. Some weeks after the receipt of the letter in which the Marshal reproaches her with her coldness towards him, she writes to him from Tours in a tone which, though doubtless friendly, is in no way compromising. She even asks him to send on the letter to her husband. She knew perfectly well the object of the Marshal's attentions and persecutions, and may well have said to herself that, while determined not to yield, she had every right to profit by his disposition to aid her. This, in any case, is what she wrote:—

“1750—TOURS, 10th January.

“I have begged so much that at last I have got people to interest themselves in me, and an exile to Issoudun has been substituted for the *lettre de cachet*, which is now raised. I shall at least have the consolation of hearing from you, and of giving you news which, to my vexation, I could not previously do.

“If you know where my dear husband is, prevail upon him not to expose himself, and send him on

the letter; otherwise, burn it. I write to you from here, because I fear that the letters which I shall address to you from my place of exile may be opened.

"Mamma sends you a thousand compliments.

"Do not tell anyone that I have written to you."

On 11th February following Mme. Favart obtained a permit from M. Bérrier, lieutenant of police, to absent herself for a month from her place of exile. This permit was renewed a month afterwards, and on the 21st June of the same year, 1750, the two *lettres de cachet* against M. Favart and his wife were revoked.

What, meanwhile, had M. Favart been doing?—M. Favart, who had been worried and frightened merely to keep him away from his faithful wife. Afraid either to go to Lunéville lest he should be arrested like her, or to return to Strasburg, he found a place of concealment at the house of a village priest. According to the *Memoirs* of the Abbé de Voisenon, he remained hidden in a cellar, where by the light of a lamp, he gained a precarious



livelihood by exercising his talent for painting fans. Nothing could shake his firmness of character.

This is also shown in a letter which he addressed from his cellar to M. Conigliano, the friend who had sheltered him at Strasburg:—

“*La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure*  
*Je vais le prouver tout-à-l’heure ?*”

“It is thus that La Fontaine begins his fable of the ‘Wolf and the Lamb.’ Do not be astonished, then, if I begin my letter in like manner. I am unhappy, my friend; I have two incurable vices, which are never forgiven—a tender heart, and honesty. You, who are capable, like myself, of the same faults, will, I am sure, not blame me. The short time I passed with you revealed to me a happily constituted disposition, which sympathy assimilated to my own. Both of us slightly misanthropical, you from philosophy, myself from temperament, we do not understand the art of paying court at the expense of honour. Hence the disappointments which you have experienced, and hence the misfortunes which have not ceased to overwhelm me for several years past. You are the

only person to whom I have confided my grief. You, my dear friend, who are sensitive like all good people, fly from love as the greatest of all evils! Judge by my own case; a violent and blind passion has plunged me into a frightful abyss from which I can never escape. The greater part of my friends have abandoned me, and with infamy as the only means of escape offered to me, I must stay where I am. I will not save myself through its aid, which would only make my condition worse. In my present situation my misfortunes are dear to me; they are my justification. Is not my persistence in refusing the most brilliant advantages, and in preferring to them the most frightful misery, sufficient to blunt all the darts of calumny? Base flattery and servile timidity, directed by vile selfishness, seek to ruin my character, by way of paying court to supreme grandeur. But it will be impossible to deceive sensible people, for whom truth is truth, under whatever disguise it may be presented with the view of taking them in.

“Since I left you I have wandered from town to town. A priest, an honest man, being informed

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of my misfortunes, has procured me an asylum where I live unknown under an assumed name."

To do the Marshal justice, he endeavoured though in vain, to make amends for the grief and the material losses which the unhappy couple had suffered through him. On 22d October 1749, he wrote to a Mdle. Fleury the following letter, which showed that he wished to conceal from Favart and his wife the hand which had struck them, while showing them the one which was able and willing to save them:—

"1749—CHAMBORD, 22nd October.

"I have received, my dear friend, the letter which you wrote to me on the 18th, and I hear with genuine grief of what has happened to the little fairy. I thought her out of danger. She had written to me a letter from Commercy, and I had answered it to Lunéville, according to the address she had given. But she would not have received my letter, and even if she did receive it, it would be of no use, for I thought her already in safety. She never would follow my advice,

and when I refused her an asylum at Chambord, I did so in so feeble a manner that she might well have seen that I should not give her up, and that she was at liberty to go there. No one would have thought of seizing her at my own place without telling me beforehand, and I should have warned her not to go to Fontainebleau until all the intrigues that had been woven were undone. But all these regrets are useless at present. We must think of remedies, and that is no easy matter, for I am not at the Court, and I do not know by what band of bigots the blow has been struck. I knew well enough that an influential priest from Saint-Sulpice had been with the Father to the Italian Theatre; and I told you that I called upon the Curé, who is a man of weight, and my friend, in the hope of discovering this priest, but could not meet with him. I cannot say whether the Duke of Orleans had anything to do with it, the Bishop of Mirepoix, or who—certainly someone in an important position; and on these occasions the bigots spare neither money nor influence. We have had examples of that in the case of Mdlle. Lemaure, Mdlle. Gaussin, and

so many others whose youth and talents were not so dangerous as those of the little fairy.

“Finally, I shall do my best, and I shall write to two persons; but if that Bishop de Mirepoix is the man, I shall not succeed. The King looks upon him as a saint, and believes everything he says.

“Nothing apparently will happen to little Favart himself, for his talent is not dangerous in the way of mortal sins, and what he writes can be corrected, as his pieces pass through the police. Above all, he is not dangerous for society without the little fairy. If she had not been taken, they would perhaps have exiled him. But nothing worse could have happened, and such a position might have been rendered tolerable and even agreeable. Yet that of the little fairy is terrible. How I pity her poor mother, who is an excellent woman, and thoroughly sensible. I have been her friend since the first time I spoke to her. Tell her that I will do my best; and as she and Favart have not a sou, beg her to accept fifty louis, for which you will find an order enclosed. That will help them for the present, and I promise them assistance in every way for the future.

“That M. Meunier of whom you speak, could he not manage to find out who the said Father is? That would be a great point; and if we once reached it, I think I should know how to treat the affair. A Father is always a Father, and bears with him a character which does not belong to me. When he speaks, the bigots have nothing to say. Anyhow, try this course; or get the little fairy’s mother to try it. It will at least enable her to write to her daughter. Farewell, dear friend. Write to me often.”

The money offered in this letter was refused. Nor was the second attempt in the same direction more successful. M. Favart, to whom the first order had been forwarded, sent it back to his mother, with this letter written on the back of it:—

“MY MUCH RESPECTED MOTHER,—You think as I do; a benefit which carries with it dishonour is an additional insult. Let the order be sent back.

“FAVART.”

Marshal Saxe seems to have thought that, through the intercession of his friend Mdlle. Fleury, he might possibly succeed in prevailing upon Mme. Favart, the mother, to accept what her son so indignantly rejected.

"You must really make use of what I send you," wrote Mdlle. Fleury to the mother of the "little fairy." "This is the advice of a friend, which is as sincere as the respect with which, all my life, I shall be, madame, your very humble servant,

FLEURY."

The only favour the little fairy was ready to accept from the Marshal was the cessation of the persecution which he had been directing against her and her husband. The following letter, which her sister-in-law, Mdlle. Favart, addressed to her in December 1749 (apparently in answer to another letter) leaves no doubt on this point:—

"If you think as you show you do, my dear sister, I do not see that you can be in any doubt as to the course to take. It was not necessary to ask the advice of my brother. You must know

him well enough to be sure that he would not give you any counsel different from that which he has always given. He knows of no possible arrangement with infamy. The most cruel punishments would not frighten him, nor could he be seduced by the most brilliant advantages. He sheltered himself for a time from the rest of the misfortunes prepared for him, and did so not for his own sake. The loss of you had rendered his life intolerable, but he yielded to our prayers. He feared the despair of the mother and the sister, already terribly afflicted by his misfortunes. His son, ourselves, and yourself, are the only objects of his fear and of his hope. Nothing else can interest him now. He has lost, through these continual persecutions, his friends, his patrons, his property, his talent, his health, and all his resources. But everything in his eyes will be repaired when he finds in you sentiments worthy of himself. He does not ask to be their object. Honour alone must decide you. Content with loving you, he asks for nothing in return, knowing as he does, by sad experience, that the heart is not to be commanded. If it be true that you have been detained by force,



now that you are free you can find with us a poor but honourable asylum. Although everything has been done to cast upon my brother and upon us a part of the disgrace in which you were being plunged, no one has been deceived but persons who were either ignorant or prejudiced. Our poverty, our misfortunes justify us in the eyes of sensible people; for which reason our condition has become dear to us, and by contenting ourselves with it we can silence all detractors. Such are the sentiments of my brother and of ourselves. I write them to you by my mother's orders. Farewell, dear friend; your loving sister embraces you, and expects you. Farewell."

Soon afterwards, either because Marshal Saxe had become tired of persecuting in vain, or from some more honourable feeling, he ceased to trouble the lives of Favart and the little fairy. They returned to Paris, where the husband obtained some moderately paid appointment, while the wife resumed the exercise of her art. The husband's imagination seems to have been chilled, his invention stopped by the cruel treatment he had

received, and for some little time the once fertile author ceased to produce. He does not seem to have breathed quite freely until, on the 30th November 1750, not many months after the return of himself and the little fairy to Paris, the great Marshal died by a fall from his horse.

Here the kindly nature of Favart was once more to show itself. "I think" he wrote, "I may be permitted to say, on the death of this illustrious man of war, what the father of our theatre said of Cardinal de Richelieu,—

'Qu'on parle bien ou mal du fameux Maréchal,  
Ma prose ni mes vers n'en diront jamais rien.  
Il m'a fait trop de bien pour en dire du mal ;  
Il m'a fait trop de mal pour en dire du bien.'

Favart and his wife could now occupy themselves freely with the theatre, and with the theatre alone. Favart recovered his invention and his verve, while Mme. Favart showed herself more charming than ever. She advanced from one success to another, playing constantly in her husband's pieces; and it appears, from a letter addressed to her by M. Rochon de Chabanne, author of several successful comedies, that her

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talents as an actress and as a singer were equalled by those she now displayed as a dancer.


"There is a lady of my acquaintance," he wrote, "who has the greatest desire in the world to see you in the *Gipsy*. I told her that you were the most fascinating enchantress in the world, that no one could resist your charms, that you made an old miser fall in love with you, that you made demons and a bear dance before you, that you turned the head of the public, and secured the support even of the women. The lady replied that you must be indeed a sorceress to do all this, that I had redoubled her curiosity, and that she would profit by the very first occasion to see you."

The affectionate couple were now repaid for their previous misfortunes by twenty-two years of unbroken happiness; "during which," says one of their biographers, "no cloud troubled the pleasures procured for them by love and friendship, and the education of their children."

During their long and prosperous career M. and Mme. Favart were invited to every grand entertainment given at Paris, whether by princes or

private persons. Favart was as celebrated for his good-nature as for his wit, and on one occasion when an unknown gentleman called upon him and calmly asked him to write him a piece for some entertainment that he was about to give, the amiable dramatist, whether from a general feeling of surprise, or because he was astonished at the audacity of the invitation, agreed to supply the desired work. He wrote it, and some weeks afterwards was amused to hear that it had been played with the greatest success, and that the gentleman who had given it had received innumerable compliments as having written it himself.

M. and Mme. Favart lived together most happily until 1772, when, as the result of an illness contracted two years before, at the time of the birth of her second son, the charming actress for whom Favart had suffered so much, and had shown himself ready to suffer even more, was taken from him. After the first period of acute grief the disconsolate husband made his wife the subject of the following eulogy, in which will be found all the principal incidents of her dramatic career:—



"1772—15th May.

'Marie-Justine-Benoîte Duronceray was born at Avignon, the 15th June 1727, in the parish of Saint-Agricole. She was the daughter of André-René Duronceray, formerly member of His Majesty's choir, and afterwards musician of the late King Stanislas, and of Perette-Claudine Bied, also one of the musicians of the King of Poland's household. This prince, who interested himself in the happiness of all who surrounded him, was kind enough himself to contribute to the education of the little Duronceray, who already made herself remarked by the precocity of her talent. She was taught dancing, music, various instruments, and the elements of language, by the most skilful masters. In 1744 her mother obtained leave from King Stanislas for the child to visit Paris. Mdlle. Duronceray appeared at the Opéra Comique and at the Fair of Saint-Germain under the name of Mdlle. Chantilly, first dancer of the King of Poland. She came out in the part of Laurence, which she played for the first time in a piece entitled *Les Fêtes Publiques*, composed on the occasion of the first marriage of the late Dauphin. She obtained

much success, as well in her dances as in her dialogue and her songs.

“This same year the Opéra Comique was entirely suppressed, because its progress alarmed the other theatres. M. Favart, who was then director-general of the Opéra Comique, as representing the Académie Royale de Musique, obtained permission to give a spectacular pantomime at the Fair of Saint-Laurent, under the name of Matheus, dancer from England, still as representing the Grand Opera, in order to fulfil the engagements which had been made with the actors of the Opéra Comique. Mdlle. Chantilly and Mdlle. Gobé ensured its success by the manner in which they executed a pantomime in one act entitled the *Vintage of Tempe*. Towards the end of the same year, in the month of December, Mdlle. Chantilly married M. Favart, whom she followed to Brussels, where he had been entrusted with the direction of the local theatre. It was here that her talents took their full development; dangerous talents, which drew upon her, as upon her husband, the most cruel persecutions from those on whose protection they had a right to count. They preferred,

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in order to escape them, to sacrifice the whole of their fortune; which they did, after satisfying all their engagements, and paying the debts of the theatre. Mme. Favart came then to Paris, where she appeared at the Théâtre Italien, the 5th August 1749. Her success was unexampled; but the persecutions before mentioned were renewed, and prevented her from making the appearances announced. At last she got the better of her enemies, and in the following year she reappeared at the same theatre, on the 18th January, with more success than ever. Her frank and natural gaiety rendered her acting as agreeable as it was vivacious. She had no models, but served as model to others. Fitted for all parts, she undertook them with surprising truthfulness. Soubrettes, heroines, country girls, simple parts, character parts, all became her; in a word, she multiplied herself indefinitely, and one was astonished to see her play the same day in four different pieces parts of the most opposite character. *La servante Maîtreſſe*, *Bastien et Bastienne*, *Ninette à la Cour*, *Les Trois Sultanes*, *Annette et Lubin*, *La Fée Urgèle*, *Les Moissonneurs*, etc., proved that she could seize

every shade, and that, being never like herself, she transformed herself and appeared really to be the personage she was representing. She imitated so perfectly the different idioms and dialect that the persons whose accents she borrowed thought she indeed came from the same part of the world.

“Returning from a tour in Lorraine, she was stopped at the Paris barriers wearing a dress of Persian silk ; two other dresses of the same kind were found in her box. These stuffs were at that time severely prohibited. They were on the point of being seized ; but she had sufficient presence of mind to say, in a gibberish, half-French, half-German, that she was a foreigner, that she did not understand the customs of France, and that she had dressed according to the fashion of her own country. She was so convincing that the principal clerk at the barrier, who had stayed some years in Germany, took her part, allowed her to pass, and made her many apologies. She was the first actress who observed propriety of costume ; she was not afraid to sacrifice the charms of her countenance to truthfulness of re-



presentation. Before her time, the actresses who played the parts of soubrettes and peasant girls wore immense baskets with diamonds in their hair, and gloves up to the elbow. In *Bastienne* she wore a woollen dress like a young village girl, her hair flat on her head, a simple cross of gold, with naked arms and wooden shoes. This originality displeased some critics in the pit; but sensible men made them hold their peace by saying to them: 'Messieurs, ces sabots là donneront des souliers aux comédiens.'

"In the comedy of *The Three Sultanas* the true costumes of Turkish ladies were seen for the first time on our stage; they had been made at Constantinople with materials of the country. This dress, at once decent and voluptuous, was also objected to. When the parody of *Les Indes Galantes* was given at the Court, Mme. Favart was obliged to put on the ridiculous and fantastic costume established by custom. Nevertheless, some time afterwards the opera of *Scanderberg* was represented, and this time the Sultana's dress of Mme. Favart was borrowed as a pattern. Mdlle. Clairon, who had also the courage to introduce

truthfulness of costume at the Comédie Française had a dress made for herself on the same design, and wore it on the stage.

"In the interlude called *Les Chinois*, represented at the Italian Theatre, she appeared, as did also the other actors, clothed exactly in the Chinese manner.

"The dresses she had procured had been made in China, while the designs for the scenery and properties had in like manner been made on the spot. In a word, she neither spared nor neglected anything which could increase the prestige of theatrical illusion.

"The talents she possessed were nothing in comparison with the qualities of her heart. A sensitive soul, probity intact, exceptional generosity, a fund of gaiety which nothing could change, a calm philosophy, constituted her character. She was always looking out for opportunities of rendering a service. Such was her constant thought; and though she was often met by ingratitude, she said: 'They may do what they please; they shall not deprive me of the satisfaction I feel in rendering a service.' She never employed her influence

for herself, but always for the benefit of others. She took charge of the education of her brother, gave happiness to her family, and supported secretly many persons who were in the depths of poverty. In the month of June 1771 the malady of which she was to die declared itself. It did not shake her firmness, and, though she knew that her state was desperate, she continued to play in the interests of her comrades until the end of the year 1771. She took to her bed on Twelfth-day, and sent for notaries to make her will, which she executed with a cheerfulness which astonished them. Some days afterwards she had a violent crisis, when her nurse, who thought she was dying, fell on her knees crying out: 'Courage! courage, madame! It is nothing; I will take the linen to be touched at the shrine of the blessed Saint Geneviève.' Mme. Favart, who had now recovered her senses, replied: 'I do not indulge in mummery of that kind; but I know that such and such persons are in want, take them from me enough to give them solace; good actions are worth more than prayers.' Immediately afterwards she asked for the sacraments of the Church, which were administered to her. She

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received them with entire resignation, but without losing anything of her natural character; she even made her own epitaph, which she set to music during the intervals of the most cruel pain. She made light of her condition, and consoled those who approached her. She occupied herself with the care of her household, and with the most minute details, until the evening but one before her death, which took place on the 21st of April last, at four o'clock in the morning.

“Mme. Favart did indeed take part in the pieces with which her name has been connected as much by the subjects, which she indicated, the framework, which she prepared, and the selection of the airs, as by the thoughts she furnished, the couplets she composed, and the different vaudevilles which she set to music. Her merit in this style was little known, because her modesty prevented her from boasting of it. Isolated, retired in the bosom of her family, she did not seek to make her court, occupied as she was with her profession. Her harp, her harpsichord and books were her only amusements. At most five or six persons of high character formed her society. Such was Mme. Favart.

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"The following verses were written to be placed beneath her portrait,—

'Nature un jour épousa l'art ;  
De leur amour naquit Favart,  
Qui semble tenir de son père  
Tout ce qu'elle doit à sa mère.'"

After the death of his wife, Favart occupied himself with friendship and the cultivation of his garden. Laplace was his constant companion; Goldoni his never-failing correspondent. In 1791 he invited the Venetian dramatist, by an epistle in verse, to visit him at Paris, and Goldoni came. Favart's last and perhaps one of his best works was the legislation which, in co-operation with Goldoni, he succeeded in procuring in favour of authors and their families, to whom all the benefits of copyright and performing right had been previously denied.

# SOPHIE ARNOULD.

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## CHAPTER I.

LATE in life, when she was suffering from poverty, and scarcely knew where to turn for money, Sophie Arnould was asked to write her *Memoirs*. She indignantly rejected the proposition, evidently believing that the bookseller wished her to make revelations concerning not only herself, but also the various personages of importance whom, in the days of her prosperity, she had intimately known. Ultimately, however, she seems to have resolved to write at least an account of her own life, though she did not proceed very far with her autobiography. Nor, to judge by its scanty pages, does it appear that the fair Sophie was as witty

with her pen as with her tongue. The excellence of her spoken *mots* is undeniable, whereas her written words are quite ordinary. She describes somewhere the character of her wit, saying that it consisted in her being able to see at a glance everything she was capable of seeing in a person, a situation, or a remark; and she adds that the different appearances which thus came before her might be compared to those presented by a looking-glass with many facets.

In the few pages of her autobiography that have been preserved — unless, indeed, these were all that she wrote — she sets forth, in the first place, that her parents were of the middle class, but superior by their education and tastes to those around them. Sophie's mother numbered Voltaire among her friends; and Fontenelle, a few days before his death, called to show her the MS. of one of Corneille's tragedies. Diderot and d'Alembert were frequently entertained by M. and Mme. Arnould; and after the husband had gone to bed—for he hated sitting up late—the wife would talk about all things knowable and unknowable with the two encyclopædists.

Sophie was put out to nurse; and she sets forth, in her own brief *Memoirs*, that her nurse having fallen ill, she was "suckled, like Chloe, by a goat." She had no recollection of having been taught to read, and very little of having been taught to write. But, as a matter of fact, she did read at the age of four or thereabouts, while at seven she wrote better than at the time of penning the introduction to her *Life*. She remembers, however (or perhaps her parents afterwards told her), that at the age of two and a half she began to study music, and she declares that when she was between seven and eight she could read it. She was from the beginning a spoilt child, and from the most tender age used to be allowed to clothe her delicate little person in silks and satins, to put flowers in her hair, and otherwise to decorate herself.

When Sophie was four or five years old the Princess of Modena, wife of the Prince de Conti, from whom she was separated, took a great fancy to the little girl, and begged the parents to let her have the child to live with her. Mme. de Conti, according to Sophie, trotted her about everywhere "like a little dog"; made her, in fact, a plaything—

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now caressing her, now setting her down to the piano, now showing her with pride to her friends, and immediately afterwards turning her out of the room to be the companion of the servants.

Everything was done by Sophie's parents for her education, and especially her musical education. "My mother," she writes, "whom I loved so much, who was so loveable and so much to be regretted, gave me masters of all kinds." Before she was twelve years old the Latin and Italian languages were, by her own account, familiar to her. At ten she was a charming singer.

When the time for her first communion drew near, Sophie was placed in the Convent of the Ursulines of Saint-Denis, whose Superior was her mother's fellow townswoman and friend. Here and at once she gained her first triumph; and soon the Court and the whole city went to hear her sing. Voltaire, from his retreat at Ferney, wrote to his little friend to congratulate her on her success as a vocalist. But as he mixed up with his congratulations remarks on her success in the character and costume of a first communicant, Mme. Arnould (who, friend as she was of the encyclo-

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pædists, did not share their views on the subject of religion) threw the letter into the fire.

On leaving the convent, Sophie went to live, as if permanently, with Mme. de Conti. The most celebrated music masters were now engaged for her, and Jéliotte, the most distinguished ornament of the Opera, taught her singing. One day Mme. de Conti, happening to go to a certain convent, found that the nun who should have sung the *Tenebræ* in the service for Holy Wednesday had suddenly fallen ill. As it was found impossible to replace her, Mme. de Conti proposed Sophie as a substitute, and the Abbess accepted the offer.

The service began, and the little girl, first timid, then encouraged by her own success, eclipsed all her previous efforts, singing with so much expression that the congregation were in ecstasies. The next day the church was crowded for the sake of hearing the young vocalist, who had touched every heart the day before. When Sophie finished singing a murmur of delight ran through the church. On the morning of Good Friday the church doors were forced, as if by assault, and it is recorded that more than two hundred carriages were turned

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back. Sophie sang on this occasion the *Miserere* of Lalande, and sang it with such pathos as to draw tears from all who heard her.

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## CHAPTER II.

So great was the young vocalist's success that the next morning all the rank and fashion of Paris called at Mme. de Conti's to congratulate her *protégée*, and to write their names in the visiting-book. Even Marie Leszczinska, in her retirement, wished to see the new celebrity, and Sophie was now presented to the Queen.

"On account of you," said Madame de Conti, a little piqued, though proud all the same of Sophie's success, "Her Majesty remembers me."

When the carriage reached Versailles, it stopped at the entrance to the palace, and the little girl was taken upstairs and received by the Queen in the kindest manner. Her Majesty kissed the child on the forehead, and murmured, "She is indeed

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charming." Sophie was permitted to sit down. Then several portfolios of music were brought in, and she was told to choose what she would like to sing, and not to be afraid. Sophie attacked one of her favourite pieces, and she had scarcely finished when the Queen, who was a good musician, said to Madame de Conti,—

"I must really have her, my dear cousin. You will give her up to me, will you not?"

Refreshments were brought in, and the Queen talked to Sophie for some time before dismissing her with an affectionate caress.

But though Marie Leszczinska was the legitimate Queen of France, there was an illegitimate one in the person of Mme. de Pompadour; and the day after the interview with the Queen, Mme. de Pompadour's lady-in-waiting, Mme. Du Hausset, brought Mme. de Conti a letter in which Mme. de Pompadour begged the loan of the little singer until the evening.

Mme. de Conti thought at first of complying with the request; but a moment's reflection told her that this would never do. A struggle between the Queen and the favourite was going on as to

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which should take possession of Sophie; and Mme. de Conti, wishing neither to fail in respect towards the former nor to provoke the latter, could not but hesitate. At last she sent for Sophie's mother, and Mme. Arnould was told to take her child, as from Mme. de Conti, to Mme. de Pompadour.

When Sophie and her mother arrived, Mme. de Pompadour received them kindly. Then she told them that she must speak for a few minutes to the King, and left them to themselves.

While Mme. de Pompadour was absent, Sophie passed her hands over the keys of a magnificent harpsichord which had attracted her attention. Returning suddenly, Mme. de Pompadour caught her in the act, but was only amused and pleased at the little girl's self-confidence.

"You were made for the stage," she said. "You will not tremble before the public."

Sophie was asked to sing, and the Marchioness was delighted with her voice. Who had been her masters? she inquired; and she became sad when Sophie told her that she had studied under the

same professors who had taught her daughter Alexandrine, recently dead.

After some conversation on musical and other subjects, Mme. de Pompadour lowered her voice and said to Mme. Arnould: "If the Queen should happen to want your daughter for the palace, do not have the imprudence to give her up. The King goes from time to time to the family concerts, and instead of giving this child to the Queen, you would have made a present of her to the King."

Then Mme. de Pompadour looked at the lines in the little girl's forehead and hand, as though telling her fortune, and afterwards said to her gravely: "Vous ferez une charmante princesse."


A few days later Mme. Arnould was informed from Versailles that the Queen had deigned to admit Sophie into her company of singers. On Mme. Arnould a similar appointment had been conferred; and the mother was to receive the same salary as her daughter, one hundred louis. Soon afterwards another communication arrived announcing that Sophie was attached by the express command of the King to His Majesty's music establishment, and in particular to his Opera.

At this news Mme. Arnould burst into tears, and hurried to Mme. de Conti to ask how she could best protect herself against the excessive favour shown to her daughter by the King. Mme. de Conti took Sophie to her friend the Abbess of Panthémont.

"Let me confide to you," she said, "this young girl, who must not become an actress, but who has been officially appointed to the Opera; conceal her somewhere in your convent until I have had an opportunity of speaking to the King."

The Abbess, however, replied that salvation was possible in every profession, and that she could not go against the wishes of the King, who had given her her appointment. Finally, she recommended Mme. de Conti to try the Abbess of Saint Antoine or of Val-de-Grâce. Mme. de Conti made two more attempts; but the three abbesses were equally afraid of counteracting the King's designs, and Sophie was abandoned to her fate.

Sophie's father, who was an honourable man, fell ill when the terrible truth was told him. Then, unable to attend to his affairs, he became a bank-



rupt. He now started a lodging-house or hotel, at which, according to the interesting researches made with so much care by the brothers De Goncourt, "persons from the country" were taken in at thirty sous a night. The family had got into such a position that Sophie's parents no longer held out so firmly as before against the appointment and the emoluments offered to their child. Mme. de Conti, who herself felt obliged to accept a compromise, assured them that Sophie would, in the first instance, be only employed at the Opera for the concerts of sacred music given during the Holy Week.

It must be understood that in the days of the old monarchy a girl once inscribed on the books of the Opera was released from all control on the part of her parents. She might present herself of her own accord, or her name might be entered on the list by anyone who had succeeded in leading her away from her parents. In neither case had her family any power over her. *Lettres de cachet* were issued commanding the person named in the order to join the Opera; and many young girls were thus victimised.



“Qu’on la séduise !” wrote the poet Gilbert, in some indignant lines inspired by an act of villainy which the Duke de Fronsac had committed,—

“Qu’on la séduise ! Il dit : ses eunuques discrets  
Philosophes abbés, philosophes valets,  
Intriguent, sèment l’or, trompent les yeux d’un père.  
Elle cède, on l’enlève ; en vain gémit sa mère !  
Echue à l’opéra par un rapt solennel  
Sa honte la dérobe au pouvoir paternel.”

It can scarcely be supposed that the privileges granted to the Opera were intended, in the first instance, to be turned to such evil account as they were afterwards put to. Indeed, young men, equally with young women, could be seized and committed to operatic control wherever they were found. “We wish and it pleases us,” says King Louis XIV., in the letters-patent granted to the Abbé Perrin, the first director of the Académie Royale de Musique (1669), “that gentlemen (gentilshommes) and ladies may sing in the said pieces and representations of our Royal Academy without being considered for that reason to derogate from their titles of nobility, or from their rights and immunities.” Many nobles of both sexes

profited by this permission to appear either as singers or as dancers at the Opera.

Young girls, amateurs, male and female, whose voices had been remarked, could be arrested and forced to appear at the Opera; and, in the case of young girls, it was evidently to the interest of the Académie Royale de Musique that it should be able to profit by their talents without interference on the part of the parents, who might well object to their being condemned to such service.

Besides being liberated from all parental restraint, the pupils and associates of the Academy enjoyed the right of setting creditors at defiance. The salaries of singers, dancers and musicians belonging to the Opera were explicitly liberated from all liability to seizure for debt.

Of the freedom conferred by an engagement at the Opera, the young woman who enjoyed it would probably have been the last to complain; for, side by side with operative conscription, a system of operative privileges was in force. It was not the custom for young ladies in good society to visit the Opera before their marriage.

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But a *brevet de dame* could be obtained, and the fortunate holder of such a document could, without infringing any law of etiquette, attend all operatic performances. "The number of these brevets," says Bachaumont in his *Mémoires Secrets*, "increased prodigiously under Louis XVI., and very young persons have been known to obtain them. Thus relieved from the modesty and retirement of the virginal state, they gave themselves up with impunity to all sorts of scandals. Such disorder has opened the eyes of the government; and it is now only by the greatest favour that one of these brevets can be obtained."

In being assigned both to the Opera and to King Louis XV.'s private company of singers, such an attractive girl as Sophie Arnould ran a double, indeed a multiple danger; for if she escaped the King, and the King's unscrupulous agents, any of the rich and profligate noblemen who frequented the Opera were at liberty to attack her, without her parents having either the opportunity or the right to defend her.

When the *lettre de cachet* arrived from Versailles appointing Sophie Arnould to the Académie de

Musique, and when Mme. de Conti found it impossible to obtain for her *protégée* the shelter of a convent, it occurred to the parents that their daughter had better marry an old gentleman, an ancient beau of the first distinction, who had for some time past been soliciting her hand. The Chevalier de Malézieux, as the admirer in question was named, had made many conquests in his time; and he had now himself been conquered. He was sixty years of age, and in spite of his excessive attention to his personal appearance—a little, perhaps, in consequence thereof—he looked the old man that he really was. Mme. de Conti had heard of the Chevalier's passion for Sophie, and, calling one day when he was at the house talking to Mme. Arnould, said to him in the most friendly manner: "Do you really think your nephew would make my dear Sophie a good husband?" The Chevalier replied that it was he himself, and not his nephew, who wished to marry Sophie. The Princess could not restrain an expression of surprise; and soon afterwards she charitably remarked that a prince of her house, who had contracted marriage at the age of eighty,

had died the same night. The Chevalier de Malézieux replied that the unfortunate prince, her relative, was not a man to be laughed at, but to be pitied; and there the conversation ended.

The next day, when Sophie was assisting at Mme. de Conti's toilette, the Princess said to her: "Marry the Chevalier if he will settle all his fortune upon you. If he only proposes to give you his name, do not take charge of his infirmities, but leave him to himself. There is selfishness and madness in the passion of this man."


But the danger to which she was exposed at the Opera and at Versailles made Mme. de Conti think that Sophie had better after all accept the Chevalier, who, beyond doubt, loved her sufficiently to make over to her all he possessed. He had an income of 40,000 livres (£1600) a year, and he declared himself quite ready to settle all he possessed upon his adored Sophie.

Mme. Arnould now took the Chevalier's part, and urged his suit, while the Chevalier, on his side, was more eager in his attentions than ever. At this time he seems occasionally to have taken Sophie to the Opera, where she appeared, however,

only in the character of spectator. She was on the books, but had not yet made an appearance.

Sophie, however, could not accept the love of her antiquated admirer, and there was a better reason for this than any that has yet been suggested. She was in love with another man.

Like Francis I. in *Le Roi s'amuse*, and the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, like Count Almaviva in *Le Barbier de Séville* and in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (with none of which works could he have been acquainted), Sophie's lover went under an assumed name, and affected a simplicity of manners and condition which did not belong to him. Dorval he called himself; and he declared that he had just arrived from the country. Knowing nothing of the ways of Paris, he, in his timidity, begged M. Arnould to take charge of his purse, and Mme. Arnould of his linen. He often received letters from home, and habitually read them to his hosts. He was evidently a spoilt child, for his parents sent him several times every week presents of fish, game and fruit, which he made a point of offering to the Arnoulds, who, on their side, could do nothing less than ask him to partake of



the fare he had himself provided. He was very polite to Mme. Arnould, and, without paying any marked attention to Sophie, did not absolutely neglect her. One evening, after playing (and losing) a few games at cards with M. Arnould, he found himself attacked with an insupportable headache, and long before the usual time retired to his room, where a servant, who had entered the house by means of a false key, informed him that everything was ready. Sophie was waiting for him. He gave her his hand, the carriage was at the end of the street, and in another minute he had carried her off.

The event caused no small commotion and scandal. The poor Chevalier died of grief; and thus another incident was added to a story already sufficiently dramatic. M. Arnould, moreover, had a relapse, and Mme. Arnould was in despair.

Dorval had promised Sophie to let her parents know as soon as possible what had become of her; and two days after the elopement Mme. Arnould received a letter, full of humility and prayers for forgiveness, signed "Louis, Comte de Brancas." In a postscript to his letter the Count promised

formally to marry Sophie if he ever became a widower.

Mme. Arnould, without being fully consoled, is said to have felt pleased at the prospect of seeing her daughter some day a countess or even a duchess; for the Count's father, M. de Lauragais, was a duke. In any case a reconciliation was effected.

Sophie's own memoirs terminate with her elopement. Whether she became tired of writing them, or having lost what she had written, could not make up her mind to begin them again, seems uncertain. Towards the end of her life, Lauragais—the name by which the Count Brancas de Lauragais is generally known—suggested to her that she should write her memoirs as a means of procuring money, and above all of diverting her mind during an illness which much distressed her, and from which he saw no possible relief but in mental occupation. He argued, in reply to her objections, that so many stories about them had already been made public, that there could be no harm in giving these tales an authentic instead of a legendary form.

"I endeavoured to prevail upon Mdlle. Arnould,"



says the Count de Lauragais in a letter on the subject. “‘Our adventures,’ I said to her, ‘have been long enough in all the anecdote books of the time. The story of my taking out a summons against that unhappy Prince d’Hénin on the ground that he was killing you with *ennui*, the dispute between Mme. Barentin’s carriage and my hackney coach, and of Mme. Barentin’s giving way when she saw the face of my companion, besides, my dear friend, your own ingenious sayings and doings—all these have been told, and spoilt in the telling. We have already been disfigured by painters. Perhaps one of these days we shall have our limbs broken by sculptors. Let us preserve as much as we can. Let us write our own memoirs. We shall both die of your illness unless it be soon cured. Let us laugh at ourselves since there is no longer anyone else to laugh at. It is no use your telling me that all the charming things written to you by Favart, Collé, Marmontel, Rulhières and Chamfort, together with my letters, were burnt in ’93. Let us try to recollect them. Let us begin by writing: we can burn what we have written if it does not please us.’

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“‘My friend,’ replied Sophie, ‘I feel pleased at your making this proposition; but what I had collected, written and preserved, is lost. Although your infamous nephew deprives me of everything by leaving you nothing, and although the publication of my memoirs has been offered to me as a means of making money, I have refused. If we had written them, and I had them here, I should burn them in your presence.’”

Sophie, according to Lauragais, went on to say that in her most brilliant days she had been assiduously visited by many so-called wits, to some of whom she had rendered important services, and that she had thought that during her illness some of them would have shown that they had not forgotten the obligations they were under. But they were an ungrateful set, and she could not bear the idea of writing to amuse “ces vilaines bêtes.” Whether the fragment of Sophie’s *Memoirs*, which some years ago came into the possession of M. Edmond de Goncourt, belonged to the papers which she speaks of as having been lost, or whether, at a later period than that at which Lauragais’ letter was written, she recommenced them, seems un-

certain. All that is now extant of her autobiography terminates, in any case, with the story of her elopement.

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### CHAPTER III.

It could now matter nothing to Sophie by what dangers the position of a young woman inscribed on the books of the Opera might be surrounded; and even before the elopement she had shown herself ready to accept that position. Having been taken by Mme. de Conti to the Théâtre Français and to the Comédie Italienne (where light Italian operas were played), she had been so delighted with the stage that she longed to set foot on it herself; and on the 15th December 1757 she made her first appearance at the French Opera. She was then, according to her own account, in her thirteenth year—a most improbable story. M. Edmond de Goncourt succeeded in discovering her certificate of birth, from which it appears that she was born the 13th February 1740. At the time of her *début*, then, she was within two months of eighteen.

On the occasion of her first appearance she sang an air introduced into the ballet of *Les Amours des Dieux*, beginning with the ominous words "Char-mant amour." Of all the articles called forth by Sophie's *début*, the one that has made the most lasting impression is that of Fréron; the Jean Fréron hated and satirised by Voltaire, who, in an epigram imitated from the Greek, which may well have suggested Goldsmith's "Epitaph on a Mad Dog," wrote of him,—

"Un jour, loin du sacré vallon,  
Un serpent mordit Jean Fréron.  
Songez ce qui arriva—  
Ce fut le serpent qui creva."

Fréron, speaking of the eagerness of the public to gain admission to the theatre on the nights that Sophie sang, said that he doubted whether people would give themselves so much trouble to enter paradise.

Some months afterwards, at the beginning of 1758, *Le Mercure* wrote of Sophie Arnould and her performances: "Mlle. Arnould continues her great and well-deserved success in *Les Amours des Dieux*. She attracts the public to such an extent

that the Thursday is becoming the most brilliant day at the Opera, quite effacing the Friday. Her second air displays more even than the first the extent of her talent. She possesses at once a charming face, a beautiful voice, and warmth of feeling. She is full of expression and of soul. Her voice is not only tender, but passionate. Her animated tones carry fire into the heart of the coldest. In a word, she has received all the gifts of Nature, and, to perfect them, she still receives all the assistance of art."

In April 1758, Sophie Arnould undertook the part of Venus in the fourth act of the opera *Aeneas and Lavinia*. "This," wrote the *Mercury*, "is her first attempt in tragedy. The public saw with great pleasure that it was not unsuited to her. Accordingly she received as much and as sincere applause as she had previously obtained in ariettas and pastorals." From the part of Venus, Sophie Arnould was soon promoted to that of Lavinia. Here, again, her success was complete. "The tragic," said the same journal, "seems really the style in which she shines the most. Her gestures are noble without arrogance, and expressive without grimaces. Her

acting is lively and animated without her being once compelled to quit her own nature. This excellent actress has already partly corrected herself of a sort of slowness which is only tolerable in the operetta. Bad examples had led her astray. We beg of her to take no counsel but from herself, if, that is to say, she wishes to advance nearer and nearer to perfection."

In August the *Mercury* published another notice of Lavinia, saying that Mdle. Arnould played the part "with that intelligence, that ability, those natural and touching graces which so enchant the public. Fortunately she depended upon her own native impulses before allowing herself to be intimidated by the little prejudices of art. A model actress, even as a *débutante*, she reanimates the lyric stage, and seems to communicate something of her soul to all who have the modesty and the talent to imitate her."

Sophie Arnould is the only French actress of whom Garrick, in narrating his experiences of theatrical life in Paris, speaks with enthusiasm. As a singer she does not seem to have possessed much power, for she writes, in the fragment of

her *Memoirs* already referred to: "Nature had seconded my taste (for music) with a tolerably agreeable voice, weak but sonorous, though not extremely so. But it was sound and well-balanced, so that, with a good enunciation, and without any noticeable effort, not a word of what I sang was lost even in the most spacious buildings."

With regard to her personal appearance, Sophie writes: "As to my figure, it is slender and regular, though I must admit that I am not tall. I have a graceful frame, and my movements are easy. I have a well-formed leg and a pretty foot, with hands and arms like a model; eyes well set, and an open countenance, lively and attractive." Collé, in his *Journal and Memoirs*, declares that soon after her *début* Sophie was the recognised queen of the Opera;" and he adds: "I have never yet seen united in the same actress more grace, more truthfulness of sentiment, nobility of expression, intelligence and fire, never before more touching pathos. Her physiognomy represents every kind of grief, and while depicting horror her countenance does not lose one feature of its beauty."

On the other hand, a libeller of the time, writ-

ing in *L'Espion Anglais*, says of Sophie: "To tell you the truth, there is nothing marvellous about her. A long thin face, an ugly mouth, large teeth standing out from the gums, and a black greasy skin. I see nothing in her but two fine eyes." To judge from her portraits, there seems, beneath this libel, to have been a substratum of truth.

Two fine eyes, however, count for much; especially when animated by the wit, the feeling, the passion which belonged to Sophie.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

SOPHIE had not been two years on the stage when her furniture was seized for debt. She paid, or had engaged to pay, for her suite of rooms two thousand four hundred livres (about £96) annually, unfurnished; and when the proprietor put in an execution she owed one year's rent. This seems to show, what is indeed beyond doubt, that Sophie's affection for Lauragais was in no way



inspired by interest. He could not have lavished large sums upon her, or her effects would not have been sold for a debt of less than a hundred pounds.

Diderot represents her as saying to a lady who was interested in her, and who wished to know whether she had any diamonds,—

“No, madam; nor do I see how to a woman in my position they can be necessary.”

“Have you any settlement?”

“Settlement? No. Monsieur de Lauragais has a wife, children, a position to keep up, and I do not see that I could honestly accept the least part of a fortune which belongs to others more lawfully than to me.”

“For my part, I should leave him.”

“Perhaps so. But he likes me: I like him. It was, perhaps, imprudent to accept him; but having done so, I shall not give him up.”

Lauragais, in spite of his attachment to Sophie, and partly in consequence of it, led a terrible life. He was desperately jealous, and always full of some new and frequently wild project. His jealousy caused such worry, such pain to Sophie, that she was perpetually on the point of leaving

him, until at last a sudden freak of his compelled her to do so. Towards the end of her life, Sophie said of the years she had passed with him that they were the happiest she had known, adding, with a sudden change: "J'étais si malheureuse!" "M. de Lauragais," she said on another occasion, "gave me millions of kisses, and many millions more of tears."

According to some of Sophie's biographers, Lauragais, when he was lodging with Sophie's parents, accounted for his presence in Paris by saying that he was finishing a play, which he proposed to submit to some Paris manager. Disguises and assumptions are generally indications of some natural tendency, and a few years afterwards M. de Lauragais did really write a play. It was a tragedy on the subject of Electra; and when he had completed it, nothing would satisfy him but to go at once to Ferney, in order to read it to Voltaire. His offence does not seem an unpardonable one, but it may have been complicated with other wrongs; and on his starting for Switzerland, Sophie resolved to have nothing more to do with him. She lost no time, then, in

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putting into a carriage all the presents she had received from M. de Lauragais, including two children, and telling the coachman to drive the cargo to the house of Mme. de Lauragais, who accepted the children, but sent back the jewellery.

According to a not too trustworthy book of the day, *Mémoires Secrets de la République de Lettres*, Sophie sent with the children a letter addressed, not to the Countess, but to the Count, in these words: "Monsieur, mon cher ami, you have written a very fine tragedy, so fine that I can no more understand it than I can your conduct. You have gone to Geneva in order to receive a crown of Parnassus laurel from the hands of M. de Voltaire. But you have left me alone, abandoned to myself. I profit by my liberty, that liberty so precious to philosophers, to do without you. Do not think it ill if I am tired of living with a madman who dissected his coachman, and wished to be my accoucheur, with the intention of dissecting me also. Allow me, then, to protect myself against your encyclopædic bistouri.'

Voltaire does not seem to have thought highly of M. de Lauragais' tragedy, which was never

produced; and when the discomfited author returned to Paris, he found to his rage that his beloved Sophie had taken up with someone else.

Without excusing Sophie's conduct, it may be pointed out that the salaries paid to actresses in France, as in England during the eighteenth century, were seldom sufficient for them to live upon. Lavinia Fenton, the brilliant and fascinating Polly of the *Beggar's Opera*, received a salary of fifteen shillings a week; which, on her great success, was doubled. Sophie Arnould, during her engagement at the Opera, drew from one hundred pounds to one hundred and sixty pounds a year; and we have seen that her apartments were let to her at the rate of ninety-six pounds a year. The great Italian prime donne, moving star-like from capital to capital (though never, by the way, during the eighteenth century, visiting Paris, which had its own operatic establishment, where no outsiders were wanted) were the only actresses who were well, indeed magnificently, paid.

Lauragais, on his return to Paris, found that

Sophie had placed herself beneath the protection of M. de St Florentin. Lauragais cursed, swore, gave himself up to ungovernable passion, but ended by behaving like a gentleman. He sent to Sophie a settlement by which she was to receive an annuity of two thousand crowns (£240); and the chroniclers of the period assert that Mme. de Lauragais contributed largely towards the annuity, from her admiration for Sophie as a singer. It is more probable, if she had anything to do with the matter, that she willingly helped her husband to break off in a creditable manner a connection which must have given her much pain. It is certain, however, that the philosopher Helvetius, who for a time had been one of Sophie's most ardent lovers, introduced her after his marriage to his wife, who was delighted with her, and constantly invited her to her house. The story of Sophie's life immediately after her rupture with Lauragais is not edifying. For M. de St Florentin she had no affection; and she now had love affairs of brief duration with many others.

She fascinated everyone, and once having broken with Lauragais, thought nothing of fidelity. In

his novel of *La Paysanne Pervertie*, Rétif de la Brétonne thus apostrophises her:—

“Arnould, qui ne t’a pas adorée n’avait ni âme ni sensibilité: il n’avait rien de l’homme: c’était une huître a figure humaine.”

Meanwhile, she had by no means forgotten Lauragais, who, apart from lighter occupations, was now absorbed in scientific pursuits; and who, publishing an intemperate pamphlet on the subject of inoculation, then a novelty, was ordered to be imprisoned at Metz. Sophie Arnould, on hearing the news, was much distressed. During their separation, remembering his love and forgetting his jealousy, she had probably thought more of him than ever; and finding that he was in prison, she resolved to liberate him. Direct appeals through the ordinary channels were of no avail. In vain had the culprit’s father, the Duke de Lauragais, implored the King. One evening, however, when, in the part of Ismene, Sophie had delighted the public beyond measure, she went in her costume to the King’s Minister, the Duke de Choiseul, who had been among her most enthusiastic applauders, and, throwing herself at his feet, entreated him to

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set Lauragais free. The Duke de Lauragais' formal petition had been without effect; but Sophie's sudden prayer was irresistible. The prison doors were unlocked, and Lauragais hastened to thank Sophie for his liberation.

Having had enough of inoculation, Lauragais now took up with mesmerism, and Mesmer himself being in Paris, Sophie made his personal acquaintance, and asked him to cure her sick dog. Mesmer treated the little animal magnetically (which, said a wit of the day, was really "animal magnetism"), and after a time sent him back to Sophie, with a certificate to the effect that he was now in perfect health. Unfortunately the dog expired soon after his return home, upon which, viewing this fact in connection with the certificate, Sophie observed that it was some satisfaction to know that the poor little thing had "died in good health."

When M. de Lauragais went on some project to London, he desired that Sophie would keep him informed during his absence of what was taking place at Paris; and in a long letter on this subject she occupies herself chiefly with a dancer, Mdle. Heinel, of whom she was jealous, and concerning

whom she has many spiteful things to say. Lauragais, on his side, found it necessary when he returned to Paris to act spitefully towards the Prince d'Hénin, who had been occupying too much of Sophie's time.

Probably the Prince, who was not a lively man, did really "bore" Sophie; and, in any case, Lauragais was vexed to think that his rival had paid her so much attention. Finding Sophie somewhat indisposed, he called on an eminent physician, and asked him whether physical illness could possibly be brought on by mental worry. The good doctor answered in the affirmative, when Lauragais went on to say that the Prince d'Hénin, who was a very tiresome person, had lately been paying Mdlle. Arnould a great many visits, and that it was probably his perpetual calling that had made her indisposed. Arguing the matter seriously and at some length, the Count succeeded in persuading the physician that Sophie's malady had been brought about by the presence and intolerable conversation of the Prince d'Hénin, and he was at last prevailed upon to write a prescription to the effect that Prince d'Hénin's visits were dan-



gerous to Mdlle. Arnould's health, and must be discontinued.

Armed with this document, M. de Lauragais went to one of the law courts, and applied for a summons against Prince d'Hénin, to make him account for injuries that he had already done, and to prevent him, by a formal injunction, from committing others of the same kind. Informed of the Count's proceedings, the Prince could not but take offence. A challenge and a duel followed, but the encounter led to no evil results; and in the evening the foes met and supped together in the apartments of the lady about whom they had fallen out.

Sophie Arnould, though on the whole well treated by the Court, got herself more than once into trouble by saying imprudent things, both about Mme. de Pompadour and Mme. du Barri. A record has been preserved of a visit she received on one occasion from the lieutenant of police. "One evening" says the chronicler, "Mdlle. Arnould had given to a number of friends a grand supper, at which unbecoming remarks were made

about the Marchioness de Pompadour. The lieutenant of police called upon her the next morning and questioned her as follows:—

“‘Mademoiselle, where did you sup yesterday evening?’

“‘I forget, monseigneur.’

“‘You supped in your own apartments?’

“‘May be.’

“‘You had visitors?’

“‘Apparently.’

“‘You had, among others, persons of the highest rank.’

“‘That sometimes happens.’

“‘Who were these personages?’

“‘I don’t remember.’

“‘You do not remember who supped with you yesterday evening?’

“‘No, monseigneur.’

“‘But it seems to me that a woman like you ought to remember such things.’

“‘Yes, monseigneur; but a woman like me may forget in presence of a man like you.’”

“The frequenters of the Opera,” says the writer of the *Mémoires Secrets de la République de Lettres*,

under date of November 26th, 1769, "are now tranquil concerning Mdle. Arnould, about] whom they were much afraid. This actress, by her unexampled audacity, behaved so ill at Fontainebleau, and especially to Mme. la Comtesse du Barri, that she felt it necessary to complain to the King. His Majesty ordered that Mdle. Arnould should be sent to prison for six months, but Mme. du Barri, soon regaining her characteristic mildness and moderation, begged herself for the forgiveness of the woman whose punishment she had desired, and sacrificed her personal vengeance to the pleasures of the public, who adored this actress. The King would not at first give way, and all the graciousness, all the charm of the lady had to be put forth to dispel his severity."

Once when Sophie Arnould found herself committed for a time to Fort l'Evêque, the first thing she did was to get up a lottery for a poor prisoner. The incident was made the subject of a vaudeville, which was played with great success.

At the height of her prosperity, which she had now reached, Sophie Arnould seems to have given herself all the airs of a modern prima donna. She

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insisted that no one should be allowed to use her dressing-room, even on the nights when she did not sing; and on one occasion, when it had been set forth that she was too much indisposed to sing, she showed herself in one of the boxes, explaining her presence by saying that she had come to take a lesson from her rival Mdlle. Beauménil.

Sophie Arnould was now no longer in apartments—in what is now called a flat; she had a house, an “hotel” to herself. It was a small house, two storeys high, but it was quite as large as that of Madeleine Guimard, the celebrated dancer, which it adjoined. On the portico, which was supported by two Doric columns, might be seen the figure of Euterpe with the features of Sophie Arnould.

On the first floor were the reception rooms, with spacious ante-chambers for the servants. On the second floor were the children’s bedrooms, each bedroom with two sitting-rooms attached to it. Who these children were, it might be indiscreet to inquire; probably, however, the sons of Count Brancas de Lauragais, of whom we have already heard as having, on a certain occasion, been sent in haste, and in a fit of rage, to their father’s

wife. These children were at a later period acknowledged by the father, and bore, like him, the name of Brancas. Both entered the army, and one of them, under Napoleon, distinguished himself on several occasions at the head of his hussar regiment. In the *Bibliothèque Nationale* are preserved several drawings and plans of different portions of Mdle. Arnould's house. The drawing of the façade bears this inscription:—

“Façade of a projected house for Mdle. Arnould in the Chaussée d'Antin. The house to be constructed side by side with that of Mdle. Guimard, and of the same dimensions. BÉLANGER.”

There are plans of the ground floor, the first floor, and the second floor; and the plan of the second floor is inscribed:—

“Plan of the second floor of the house projected for Mdle. Arnould, in which there were to be four sets of apartments for the children.”

So much care did Bélanger, the architect of the

new house, give to the work, and so agreeable did he make himself to the lady for whom it was being built, that he was asked to share it with the owner; and there was at one time a serious prospect of Sophie Arnould's becoming Mme. Bélanger. To serve some purpose of her own, she spread the report that she was married to the architect, who showed himself quite disposed to give reality to the fiction. He was a merry man, and pleased Sophie as much by his ready wit as by his agreeable manners. After a time she got tired of him, and having formed an attachment for the actor Florence, wrote Bélanger a letter of dismissal, at the same time addressing to Florence an avowal of her love. Bélanger, however, found an opportunity of changing the envelopes, so that Florence the actor received the letter intended for Bélanger the architect. The next time Florence saw Sophie he was naturally somewhat cold in his demeanour towards her, and this coldness was, of course, resented by Sophie, who had written to him with much warmth.

Bélanger triumphed; and his triumph was of long duration. Sophie, indeed, remained attached to

him throughout her life. Of all her former friends, the only ones who showed genuine solicitude for her in her latter days of poverty and sickness were Bélanger and Lauragais.

Sophie Arnould's operatic career lasted twenty-one years, from 1757 until 1778. Until 1774 she sang in the operas, for the most part on mythological subjects, of Rameau; afterwards, until her now approaching retirement, in at least two operas of Gluck, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Orpheus and Eurydice*. She had only been seventeen years on the stage when, in 1774, she already thought of retiring, and was only prevented from doing so by a pressing letter from the director of the King's household. Some years before, in 1769, there had been much talk on the subject of her retirement, which, however, had it then taken place, would not have been voluntary on her part. She had so often absented herself without adequate cause, that the authorities had taken offence at her conduct. She had scarcely, moreover, been ten years on the stage when critics already began to point out, but only in the kindest manner, that her voice was not improving. She

had probably been ill-taught; and we may be sure that she was never a vocalist in the sense in which, to take the most brilliant example that can be cited, our own Adelina Patti is a vocalist; whose voice, after thirty years' continuous singing, is still in the most perfect condition.\* What Garrick said of Sophie Arnould was that she was the only French actress who had touched his heart.

The arrival of Gluck in Paris (1774) to give a series of operas, for the most part reconstructed from those which he had previously produced at Vienna, or in various parts of Italy, was of but little advantage to Sophie Arnould, who, as we have already seen, had more than the caprice of a prima donna of our own time. Soon it was to be said of her by the Abbé Galiani, in the heat of the Gluck and Piccinni contest, that she had "the finest asthma" he had ever heard; and it can be shown by comparison of dates that Gluck

\* Adelina Patti sang for the first time in London, at the Royal Italian Opera, at the beginning of the season of 1861; but she had sung on the stage a year or two before in America, and her first appearance in the concert room was made when she was but a child.



himself, and his determination not to be governed by the caprices of a spoilt favourite had much to do with her wish to retire while she was still very attractive.

The first opera produced by Gluck in Paris was *Iphigénie en Aulide*, which was brought out on the 12th of April 1774, with Sophie Arnould in the principal part, or, according to the ridiculous expression now in vogue, in the "*title-rôle*." A letter from the chief of the King's household, begging Mdlle. Arnould not to retire from the Opera, is dated February 16th in the same year. At that time the rehearsals had already commenced; and it was at one of the first rehearsals that Sophie Arnould and Gluck came to an open rupture. The German composer, then in his forty-seventh year, had, in the first instance, yielded to the seductions of the enchantress, and at her solicitation had consented to hold the first rehearsals at her house. All went smoothly, except, perhaps, in a musical sense (for Gluck is known to have had much trouble with both the singers and the musicians of the French Opera), when in walked Prince d'Hénin, "Prince des Nains" as he was called. The orchestra was playing, and Sophie

Arnould was singing; but as this was not a grand rehearsal, all the other vocalists were seated.

"I believe," said the illustrious dwarf, interrupting Mdlle. Arnould in the middle of her air, "that it is the custom in France to rise when anyone enters the room, especially if it be a person of some consideration."

Gluck leaped from his seat, rushed towards the intruder, and, with his eyes flashing fire, said to him: "The custom in Germany, sir, is to rise only for those whom one esteems." Then, turning to Mdlle. Arnould, he added, "I perceive, mademoiselle, that you are not mistress in your own house. I leave you, and shall never set foot here again."

When the story was told to Marie Antoinette, who, in conjunction with the French Ambassador at Vienna, had been the means of bringing Gluck to Paris, she was indignant with the Prince, and compelled him to apologise to the composer for the insult offered to him. The Prince must have suffered terribly; but he was obliged to call and make excuses to Gluck, though he felt that he himself was the injured party.

It was now that Sophie Arnould, doubtless from a feeling of pique, resolved to withdraw altogether from the Opera. She sent in her resignation, and in reply the following letter was addressed to her by the chief of the King's household:—

*"Feb. 16, 1774.*

"I see with pain, mademoiselle, that you think of retiring, and that your motive is the enfeeblement of your health, which does not allow you to fulfil your duty with the punctuality that you would desire. I cannot but praise your manner of thinking and of acting; but, at the same time, at your age, and with care, you may hope to re-establish your health with ease.

"Accordingly, I do not accept your proposition, not, at least, for the present. The new works which are to be brought out at the theatre, not being in your style, will leave you a sufficiently long period of rest; and in no circumstances, moreover, would anything be required of you that your strength would not permit. I am convinced that you will never abuse the goodwill entertained towards you, but that, on the contrary, it will prove

a new motive for you to contribute towards the welfare of the Academy all that in you lies."

Gluck had quite determined to hold no more rehearsals at the house of Mdlle. Arnould, and they now took place at the theatre. It became the fashion at the Court to attend them, and the doors were besieged long before the performances began. Thus numbers of persons were unable to gain admission, and much dissatisfaction was the consequence. Everyone likes to go to a rehearsal, to which admittance can be gained only by privilege; whereas anyone with a little money in his pocket can go to a public representation. To see Gluck at a rehearsal was, moreover, infinitely more interesting than to see him at one of the ordinary public performances. The composer had certain habits, and from these he would not depart for anyone. On entering the orchestra, he took his coat off, to conduct at ease in his shirt sleeves; then he removed his wig, and replaced it by a cotton night-cap of the remotest fashion. "When the rehearsal was at an end," says M. Castil-Blaze, in his *Histoire de l'Académie Royale de Musique*,

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“he had no necessity to trouble himself about the articles of dress which he had laid aside, for there was a general contest between the dukes and princes of the Court as to who should hand them to him.”

*Iphigenia in Aulis* had not been long in rehearsal when the chief of the King's household, having been warned by a civic official known as “Le Prévost des Marchands” that the crowding at the doors of the Opera, whenever a rehearsal took place, might any day lead to some tumult, issued the following order on the subject:—

“*March 31, 1774.*

“Monsieur le Prévost des Marchands seems to fear, and not without cause, that the rehearsals, at the Opera, of *Iphigenia* may lead to some tumult, by reason of the immense assemblages of persons seeking for tickets of admission. It would certainly be desirable that the rehearsals should take place with closed doors, or, at least, with no one present but a small number of connoisseurs; but I feel that it would be very difficult at the present moment to run counter to the curiosity of the

public, and that this would cause complaints on all sides. Precautions, however, must be taken so that no disturbance breaks out, and that the general rehearsals may take place quietly. The first point is to ask for a guard on the days of rehearsal; the second, to post up a notice that no one will be allowed to enter without a ticket signed by one of the directors; the third, to limit the number of persons admissible to each box; the fourth, not to issue more than three or four hundred pit tickets, and about one hundred for the amphitheatre. By these means it may be hoped that the rehearsals will take place in peace. I am writing to Monsieur le Prévost des Marchands, who wishes to have some boxes at his disposal, to say that he may ask you for as many as he requires. You will be kind enough, also, to reserve one for Mons. Villevault for Saturday's rehearsal, and one for Mons. Joly de Fleury, Councillor, for Monday's. They have both applied to me on the subject.

“*P.S.*—No one must be admitted except to the two last rehearsals. As to the others, they must take place with doors hermetically closed.”

Renewed precautions had to be taken in connection with the first public representation of *Iphigenia*. Marie Antoinette had of course arranged to be present; and the young Princess requested the Lieutenant of Police to take particular care lest there should be disturbances. Accompanied by the Dauphin, the Count and Countess of Provence, the Duchess of Chartres and of Bourbon, and the Princess de Lamballe, she entered the theatre before the public was admitted.

The Ministers and all the Court, with the important exception of King Louis XV. and Mme. du Barri, were present. Sophie Arnould was admirable in the part of Iphigenia, though, according to the chroniclers of the time, she owed her success to her acting, rather than to her singing. In the accounts of the first night of *Iphigenia*, the critics and chroniclers mention as something incredible, and almost supernatural, that Larrivée, who took the part of *Agamemnon*, abstained from singing through his nose. Larrivée, in spite of his nasal twang, was considered a fine singer. We have seen that the voice of poor Sophie in her decline was called the "finest asthma ever

heard." It used, with similar scurrility, to be said of Larrivée that his nose had a magnificent voice.

The success of *Iphigenia* was prodigious. Marie Antoinette herself gave the signal for the applause, and it mattered little to the courtiers whether they understood Gluck's grand simple music or not. All they had to do, and all they did was to follow the example of the Dauphiness. It has been said that Madame du Barri and the King did not honour the representation of Gluck's opera with their presence. It was Mme. du Barri, in fact, who headed the opposition against him. She was vexed at not having some favourite musician of her own to patronise when the Dauphiness had hers; and profiting by a temporary absence of Gluck from Paris, she resolved to send to Italy for Piccinni, in the hope that when Gluck returned he would find himself neglected for the already celebrated Italian composer.

Four months after the production of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Gluck brought out a new version of his *Orfeo*, under the title of *Orphée et Eurydice*, which was quite as successful as *Iphigenia*. In



the contemporary accounts of the performance it is specially recorded that the "ballet in particular was very fine," which makes one doubt whether the better, the more dramatic portion of the work, was really appreciated. In respect to the introduced ballet, Gluck found the same difficulties in his way which Wagner nearly a century later (1861) had to encounter in connection with *Tannhäuser*. The immutable rules of the French Opera, whose constitution, in the midst of innumerable changes of government and of governmental forms, cannot be touched, required that in every opera there should be a ballet. Gluck positively objected to the introduction of dancing into the opera of *Orpheus*. It would interfere, he said, with the seriousness and pathos of the general action, in short, would spoil the piece. He was overruled, however, by the unchangeable laws, and by the personal influence of the great Vestris, le "*Dieu de la Danse*," as the illustrious Italian called himself.

"Write me the music of a chacone, Monsieur Gluck," said the God of Dancing.

"A chacone!" exclaimed the indignant composer.

"Do you think the Greeks, whose manners I am endeavouring to depict, knew what a chacone was?"

"Did they not?" replied Vestris, astonished at Gluck's words; and in a tone of compassion he added, "then they are much to be pitied."

*Orpheus* was to be followed by the third of the series of works written by Gluck for the Paris Opera, namely *Alceste*. Gluck was now not only on indifferent terms with Sophie, by reason no doubt, in the first instance, of the scene which had taken place at her house during the rehearsal of *Iphigénie*, but also because she had shown herself intractable at the performances. It is recorded of Mdlle. Arnould that, in 1773, at a time when Gluck might already have arrived in Paris, she had a dispute with Francoeur, the director of the orchestra, as to whether she should follow the musicians, or the musicians follow her.

"What is the matter?" she said, "the orchestra seems in a state of rebellion."

"No, mademoiselle," replied the conductor (*batteur de mesure*, as he was then called), "we

are all here for the service of the King, and we serve him with zeal."

"I should like to serve him also, but your orchestra puts me out, and spoils my singing."

"Nevertheless, mademoiselle, we play in time."

"In time!" she exclaimed. "Quelle bête est-ce là? Follow me, sir; and understand that your symphony is the very humble servant of the actress who recites."

The good and evil of the position taken up by Mdle. Arnould are well set forth by M. de Goncourt on the one hand, and by Castil-Blaze on the other.

"Under the apparent insolence of her claim," writes the former, "Sophie Arnould was asserting the rights of the dramatic vocalist before the musical revolution. In fact, opera singers were then only men and women reciting musical tragedy with intonations indicated by a musician. Until then they had enjoyed the most complete independence as to the manner of presenting their phrases. Until then they had been at liberty to hurry or slacken the time, to pause on any particular note, according to the inspiration of the

moment, the orchestra following the vocalist as best it could. 'Quelle bête est-ce là?' Sophie scarcely doubted, in asking this question, that 'cete bête' was on the eve of reducing her talent and her reputation to nothing."

"What could be thought," asks M. Castil-Blaze, reproducing arguments which were used at the time, "of a style of music in which Mdle. Arnould is no longer the principal actress, in which M. Legros loses all the advantages of his fine voice, since he has neither a cadence to make nor any note which he will be allowed to prolong, in which the recitative is as simple as spoken words? If Gluck takes the trouble to note, not only the inflections of voice, but also the long notes and the short ones, the accent and the time, is it not evident that the actress has no longer anything to do? It has often been asked why Mdle. Arnould did not shine in the operas of Gluck. It was precisely because she was an excellent actress. It was because, in the true national music, she could shorten or prolong at her will the tones of her voice, according to the requirements of the situation, as understood by

her, or according, even, as she felt more or less fatigued. But now, when she has only to keep time like a mere chorus singer, what is the use of her talent? It becomes superfluous."

In spite, however, of some evidence to the contrary, it can be shown that Sophie Arnould did much by her dramatic talent to secure a favourable reception for Gluck's operas in France. So said Gluck himself, as cited by Bélanger in a letter written on behalf of Sophie Arnould to the Minister of Fine Arts, when the unfortunate singer was on her deathbed. "This unhappy woman," Bélanger calls her, "of whom Gluck said, 'Without the charm of the accents, and the declamation of Mdlle. Arnould, never would my *Iphigénie* have been accepted in France.'"

After *Orpheus*, we hear no more of Sophie Arnould in any opera of Gluck's; and two years after the production of *Orphée et Eurydice* she withdrew from the Opera, though she still sang at the Court concerts until 1780, when she retired altogether, with a pension.

Not only was Gluck ill-disposed towards her, which, under the circumstances, was natural

enough; he had even gone to live in the house of one of her youthful rivals, Rosalie Levasseur, to whom he every day gave lessons. The French Embassy at Vienna, and especially M. Du Rollet, First Secretary, who himself prepared the French libretto of *Iphigénie*, had been the means of bringing Gluck to France; and the Austrian Ambassador at Paris, Mercy d'Argenteau was, next to Marie Antoinette, Gluck's greatest friend in Paris. More than that, the said Mercy d'Argenteau took a special personal interest in Sophie Arnould's rival; and he and Gluck were equally resolved to give her, at least in Gluck's subsequent operas, the position which, in *Iphigénie en Aulide* and in *Orphée et Eurydice*, had been assigned to Sophie Arnould.

Apart from the incident at Sophie Arnould's nouse, for which one can scarcely say that she was to blame, how could the great composer tolerate a vocalist who rebelled against the conductor, and maintained that, whatever liberties she might choose to take, the orchestra was always her "humble servant"? We may be quite sure, moreover, that a singer of such celebrity as Sophie Arnould, to say nothing of her natural

and acquired indocility, would not at this period of her career have consented to take lessons of Gluck or of anyone else. We have seen, on the other hand, that Rosalie Levasseur studied with him every day; and a singer, even an inferior one, who will take pains to follow the composer's own directions, is more likely to do well than the most accomplished vocalist presuming to execute the music merely according to her own taste and fancy. It was of Rosalie, who had apparently a vulgar style, that Sophie Arnould said one night, on hearing her applauded, "Ce n'est pas étonnant; elle a la voix du peuple."

Rosalie replied by a vile satire, which was printed and thrown about the house.

"Vieille sérinette cassée ?  
Cadavre infect—"

it began, with worse to follow.

Rosalie, or rather the poet (Gúichard by name) who in her interest had undertaken to ridicule and calumniate her hated rival, went on to accuse Sophie Arnould of spitefully attacking Gluck.

The following homage is then offered to Rosalie herself :—

“ O toi, dont les accents animent nos concerts,  
Poursuis, aimable Rosalie,  
Unis ces dieux qui charment l'univers,  
Celui des arts et celui d'Italie ;  
Jouis de leurs douces faveurs :  
Séduis nos yeux, oreilles, nos cœurs ;  
Laisse crier ta jalouse ennemie,  
Tes talents font son désespoir ;  
Et du Temps qui la fait déchoir,  
Bientot, sur sa tête blanchie  
La faux terrible appesantie  
N'offrira plus aux regards indignés  
Ju'un squelette hideux, une horrible furie.”

Much of Gúichard's libellous poem is unfit for publication. For that very reason Sophie Arnould published it in its entirety, knowing that by so doing she would injure Rosalie, who had inspired it, rather than herself.

Rival prime donne of the present day are more polite to one another. Sophie, who for so many years had reigned supreme at the Opera, had now been dethroned. In her trouble she turned to the press, whose organs, however, had already for the most part deserted her. But a journalistic friend of hers named Lefuel de Méricourt wrote



her a short article, to which she had the opportunity of replying. Here, in the first place, is the article:—

“We do not know when or where this actress was born, who, for so long a time, constituted, and still constitutes, the delight of the Opera, where she plays pathetic parts with the greatest success. Many people have accused her of being spiteful, but persons who know her well assure us that, with her somewhat satirical wit, she has a good heart, and a very well organised head. She is almost the Ninon of our century. She often collects around her persons of all ranks and conditions, but always persons of wit, however different in that respect from her companions, who cannot distinguish between the polished man and the brute.”

Sophie replied by the following critical and autobiographical letter:—

“I cannot but thank you, sir, for the obliging things which you have published in your journal

both as to my feeble talents and as to myself personally. I should consider myself too happy if the public judged me with the same indulgence, and if it rendered justice to the efforts I have always made to please it and deserve its kindness. As to my age, you keep silence. Can you have been afraid of wounding my self-love by touching on so delicate a subject? Be at your ease. It is not a secret; it is at least an open one. Without any desire but that of being more interesting in my impersonations, I wish I could preserve, at least on the stage, the illusion of youth, so favourable to the prestige of the boards. For the public behaves to actors like Love to warriors: it has no consideration for an old soldier. But, perhaps a little from vanity, I am willing to take you into my confidence. I was born on the 14th Feb. 1744, in the parish of St Germain l'Auxerrois, in the very alcove in which Admiral de Coligny was assassinated. This anecdote is the only interesting thing I can relate about my birth. Everyone knows that I made my *début* in the month of Dec. 1757. Anyone who can calculate that 8 and 8 make 16 will know that 16 and 16 make 32."

According, however, to Sophie's certificate of birth, discovered and published by M. Edmond de Goncourt, she came into the world in 1740.

"I am looking out impatiently, sir," continues Sophie, "for your judgment on the opera of *Alceste*, which is about to occupy, and perhaps divide, all Paris. Your views may confirm those which I myself formed of it at the rehearsals only. If the success which I obtained in *Iphigénie* predisposes me in favour of the authors, their little regard, I may even say their evil conduct towards me has had a contrary effect. But I respect myself too much to join (as these gentlemen would have people believe) in any of the cabals formed for or against the new work; such things have always been beneath me. In the former there is *charlatanerie*, in the latter baseness. I have confined my vengeance to not claiming the principal part. But no personal reason will make me undervalue genius, nor prevent me from rendering justice to that of M. Gluck.

"He is, I proclaim it aloud, the musician of the soul [*le musician de l'âme*; Hector Berlioz called

him, some sixty years later, '*le musicien du cœur*'. He is master of all the modulations that express sentiments and passions, especially grief.

"As to the author of the words, I leave to the public the task of judging him. If I belonged to the Académie Française, my judgment would be as valuable as that of any other of the Forty. But I only belong to the Académie Royale de Musique. I acknowledge my incompetence, and my word is : *tacet*. I will only take the liberty of saying that one does not often find subjects so interesting as *Iphigenia*, nor models so sublime as Racine.

"As to the performers, if I may be allowed to speak of them, I should praise the acting of Mons. Gros in the part of Admetus, and the singing of Mdlle. Rosalie in that of Alceste.—I have the honour to be, very perfectly, Sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

"SOPHIE ARNOULD."

In spite, however, of the praises given to Rosalie by Sophie Arnould, writing under her own name, an unsigned letter was published after the first

performance of *Alceste*, in which the writer spoke as follows of the singers in that work:—

“One might say that the music was sung by invalids who had just swallowed half a pint of emetic, and were making vain efforts to vomit.”

Soon afterwards another letter appeared in the *Nouveau Spectateur*, in which Gluck was reproached with having a girl like Rosalie to play the part of *Alceste*. Several other articles of the same tendency appeared in *Le Nouveau Spectateur*, with the following among them:—

“I must see again this opera, more sad than touching, if only to confirm the opinion I have always entertained as to the superiority of Mdle. — to a rival whom M. Gluck can only have preferred to her by a mistake, and from not understanding the taste of the nation in singing as well as in acting.”

It was about this time that Sophie Arnould said of herself, that she was now “paying for the

honour of having risen to so great a height by the pain it gave her to support herself."

At a revival of *Iphigénie*, in which Sophie Arnould resumed her original part, the public hissed, and continued to hiss, though Marie Antoinette, now Queen, applauded with the view of stopping the offensive demonstrations. La Harpe, in one of his letters, relates the brutal conduct of the public. He also says that Sophie Arnould had lost her voice, and that some of her defects, which in former days were passed over, or even thought attractive, had now increased, and were too obvious to be forgiven.

"She preserves, moreover," he adds, "all the languor of the French style of singing, which is no longer in fashion. In the part of Iphigenia, Mdle. Arnould says to Achilles: 'Vous brûlez que je sois partie.' The pit applied this verse to her, and applauded vehemently."

Lefuel de Méricourt, whose theatrical journal was so long devoted to Sophie, was now no longer so enthusiastic in her praise. Speaking of the revival of *Iphigénie*, he wrote as follows:—

"We were present at this representation. We saw Mdlle. Arnould in the part of Iphigenia, and cannot help regretting the loss of a certain part of her physical gifts by an actress who was so long the delight of the public."

Thereupon Sophie's future son-in-law, de Murville, addressed to the critic an indignant letter, in which he asked whether by the phrase, "loss of a certain part of her physical gifts," he meant that she had lost a part of her voice, and added that if to have voice was to shriek, to introduce into singing outbursts of fury and despair, instead of the accents of love, then the theatrical journal might be right. "But," he added, "as I think that at the Opera, as at the Comédie Française, a melting voice and eyes embellished by tears make more impression than a thundering voice and absence of soul, therefore, in spite of the writer, I maintain that Mdlle. Arnould preserves all her voice."

The Gluck and Piccinni contests had not yet begun. Piccinni was still in Italy; but a portion of the public endeavoured to set against the music of Gluck the now antiquated music of Rameau,

which was declared to be more "tender" than that of the German master; and for a time Sophie Arnould carried on a contest in the operas of Rameau against Rosalie in those of Gluck.

M. de Murville's letters in reply to M. Lefuel de Mericourt's articles had the effect, usual in such cases, not of converting the offending journalist, but of hardening his heart; causing him, indeed, to entrench himself in the position from which the attacking party had endeavoured to dislodge him. Soon after the accession of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, Piccinni was brought to Paris; and in reference to the Abbé Galiani's famous *mot* that Sophie had the "finest asthma he had ever heard," M. de Murville wrote as follows in justification of the Abbé's view:—

"People have not forgotten that Mdle. Arnould undertook the part of Procris at the Court, and that she was obliged to give it up because it was impossible for her to sing the airs in time and to observe the orchestral accompaniments. People have not forgotten, moreover, that she played the part admirably, as she also did, and has since



done, that of Iphigenia. It must, however, be remarked that she did not sing those operas, but acted them.

"It is sometimes asserted that she still sings as well as she ever sang. I hold this proposition to be true, very true: *as well as she ever sang*. It remains to be decided whether she ever did sing.

"I remember that I have heard her recite and declaim exceeding well scenes of French recitative, in which she led the musicians, who, with their eyes open, regulated their pace by her singing.

"She would still deserve the same applause if these melancholy psalmodes were again played. But once more I appeal to herself: was she ever a singer?"

At last Sophie Arnould was obliged to retire, and she did so in 1778, after a career of twenty-one years. She appears still to have continued singing from time to time at the Court, but at the Opera her name was definitively placed on the retired list. M. Emile Campardon, in his *Académie Royale de Musique*, publishes the patent under which Sophie Arnould received, at least for

a time, from 1778 until the Reign of Terror fifteen year afterwards, her pension, which consisted of two thousand francs (£80) a year for her services as Court singer, and a like sum for her services at the Opera. The pension was a liberal one, considering that she had never been paid more than four thousand francs (£160) a year at the time of her greatest success. During her last years at the Opera, she received only one thousand francs a year. She had begun with a salary of fifteen hundred francs. After a time the pension seems to have been reduced to two thousand francs a year; and with the Reign of Terror it came to an end.

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## CHAPTER V.

AFTER her retirement from the stage, Sophie Arnould devoted herself for a time to religion, and by way of making known publicly that she abandoned the things of this world, placed on the door of her house an inscription borrowed from the last words of the mass: "Ite missa est."

But she soon abandoned what was only a new caprice. "These directors," she said (meaning directors of the conscience), "are worse than operatic directors."

Sophie now occupied herself more than she had previously done with her *salon*, which became the meeting place of all the intellectual, and especially the literary celebrities of the day. Whatever one may pick up here and there in the journals and pamphlets of the time concerning Sophie Arnould as an actress, we know that she must have been a woman of wonderful wit and wonderful charm from the names of those who habitually visited her. The poets, the philosophers, the dramatists, the critics, the encyclopædists of the day, were all at home in the house of Sophie Arnould. Helvetius was one of her greatest friends. So was Rulhières, the brilliant author of *L'Anarchie en Pologne*, who, on one occasion introduced Rousseau. Beaumarchais and Marmontel were frequent visitors. D'Alembert was constantly at the house; also Diderot, whose account of Sophie's relation with Lauragais has been already cited. Political economy was represented in her

salon by the famous Turgot, father of Madame de Stael. Garrick, when he was in Paris, gave to Sophie Arnould all the time that was not taken up by the great tragic actress Mdlle. Clairon. She counted among her friends one of the worthiest of men, Benjamin Franklin, representing at Paris the interests of the newly formed United States of America. One of the wittiest, moreover, the Prince de Ligne, was among her favourite guests; and a wittier still, Voltaire, paid her a formal visit when in 1778 he came to Paris to be crowned as a literary demi-god. Voltaire was received at Mdlle. Arnould's house by a band of children, who threw themselves about his neck and embraced him.

"You wish to kiss me," cried the old man, "and I have no longer any face." "Ah, Mademoiselle," he said to Sophie, after conversing with her for some time, "I am eighty-four years old, and I have committed eighty-four follies."

"A mere trifle," replied Sophie. "I who am not forty, have committed a thousand."

Some years later we find Sophie at a little house in the neighbourhood of Paris, at Clichy

la Garenne, with an acre of garden—which she did not cultivate.

A picture of her life at Clichy is given by M. Edmond de Goncourt, as derived from a letter written by one of her intimate friends. "I went sometimes to see Mdlle. Arnould at Clichy," says the writer. "One day I found her in the midst of a large circle. There were twenty persons at table. I was on the point of retiring, when she called me back, and said to me, 'Come in; I am marrying the son of my cook to the daughter of my gardener. All my family and all my servants are sitting down together. We are celebrating *les plaisirs de l'amour et de l'égalité*.' In the evening her two sons came in. They wanted money. She had none to give them. 'Each of you take a horse,' she at last said; and they went away with a horse a-piece."

The generous woman who, having no money for her sons, gave them the horses out of her stable, was robbed of what little remained to her by a thief, who climbed up some trellis-work in front of the house, got through a window, and carried off dresses, linen, candle-

sticks, a little plate, and a certain number of ornaments.

The goods seems to have been recovered, and Sophie Arnould, finding that the man who had robbed her was a journeyman carpenter who had been some weeks without work, and that this was his first offence, begged that he might not be prosecuted, and obtained his release.

The unhappy Sophie was now getting poorer and poorer. The Revolution was at hand. There was trouble everywhere, and her pension, originally of four thousand francs, had been reduced to two thousand. Probably it was already paid irregularly; and a few years later, from 1793, it was not paid at all, but, as an entry in the archives put it, "left owing." At last poor Sophie was obliged to apply for assistance to some of her old friends. She wrote a letter to a financier named Boutin, begging that he would arrange for her a loan of about one thousand pounds on the security of property and settlements to the value of from twenty to twenty-five thousand francs. She appears to have received the desired accommodation.

Now the Revolution broke out, and Sophie's *salon* became a political club.

Lauragais, a great admirer of the English constitution and of various English ideas which he had picked up and more or less assimilated during his stay in England, had given her a political education in conformity with the notions of the time; and ardent lover of novelty as she was, the destruction of an ancient monarchy could scarcely fail to interest her. She sent her two sons, the sons of Lauragais, to receive the Jacobinical "baptism of patriotism," and had no sooner done so than an old enemy of hers, Champscenetz, published a brutal attack upon her in the *Chronique Scandaleuse*. "There are beings," said the writer, "who would not be happy unless they had degraded themselves in every possible manner. The aged Sophie Arnould is an example of this. After delivering herself up for forty years to every scoundrel of bad taste, she has now turned demagogue, that she may receive at her house the dregs of humanity."

Sophie was much troubled, not only about herself and her own position, but also about the

position of her children, the two sons of Laura-gais, who now, through an act of legitimation, bore their father's name of Brancas. Before the outburst of the Revolution, they had been made abbés, with a view to orders, and such benefices as their father's interest might be able to procure for them. The ecclesiastical career, however, was at an end; and there was a project for sending one of the sons to board in England, that he might learn the language and afterwards enter some house of business. Ultimately they went into the army; and one of them, as already mentioned, distinguished himself greatly as colonel of a cavalry regiment. Sophie's daughter, Alexandrine, who had inherited something of her mother's wit, but little, if any, of her dramatic and musical talent, was now the wife of that André de Murville whom we have seen some years before taking the part of Sophie, in reply to the attacks of a theatrical journal. The husband turned out an unsatisfactory, and even villainous person. According to an epigram of the time, he was a sluggard, a glutton, a drunkard, and a fool; or, as the case is more gracefully put in the following verses:—



“ Hormis à table,  
Il est toujours au lit.  
Qu’il est aimable  
Quand il sait a qu’il dit !  
Mais c’est pis qu’on diable  
Pour cacher son esprit.”

After the Revolution, Alexandrine obtained a divorce from a husband whom she had previously accused in a formal manner of maltreating her and leaving her without food.

In Alexandrine’s complaint, made before a commissary of police, dated October 19, 1785 (published by Emile Campardon in his *Académie Royale de Musique au XVIII<sup>e</sup>. Siècle*), she declares that, “since she had the misfortune to marry le Sieur Murville, she has not had a moment’s peace with him. Persecuted incessantly, and without cause, by this tyrant, she has employed all possible means for bringing him back to an honourable course. . . . Several times, to the knowledge of numbers of persons, he has struck her at the end of frightful scenes. She has met her husband’s violence with nothing but meekness and forbearance, and has always been patient, even at the expense of her health. She underwent a long ill-

ness caused by her husband's excesses, and by the terrible grief they brought upon her. She would have died of misery and want, but for the assistance and kindness of her guardian, who took her to live with her, and tended her with every care for eleven months. Her illness was the result of the said *Sieur de Murville's* conduct. At the moment of her first confinement, at her guardian's house, where she was then staying, he told her, in the midst of her suffering, without the slightest regard for her condition, that her furniture was seized, that she had no longer any home, that he had no money, and that she must do as best she could by borrowing from her acquaintances—by all which she was so shocked that she was on the point of death, and three days after this scene received the last communion." Her husband had previously sold her furniture, after selling or pledging everything belonging to himself, so that she was obliged to seek hospitality at the house of her friend in view of her approaching confinement. She had been forced to make over to her husband all the moneys settled upon her, and she was now sick, destitute, and in urgent

need of medical assistance, to prevent the loss of an eye, which her husband had grievously injured at the risk of killing her.

In the second plaint, made the year afterwards, the unhappy Alexandrine sets forth that her husband refuses to pay for the support of their child, who has been put out to nurse, and that he has just abused her in the most shameful manner, calling her atrocious names. "She," continues the plaint, "supported this in patience, and did not answer him; but his repeated threats, accompanied by blows and kicks, caused her to say that he had behaved very ill in getting her to withdraw her demand for a separation, and in begging her to return to him only to maltreat her without cause; moreover, that as soon as it was light, she would have justice, and take decided steps." Thereupon, after using the vilest language, he seized her by the right arm, and with so much force as to leave a red mark, "which," says the Commissary of Police, "she has shown us, together with a swollen lip, caused, she declares, by her husband's blows;" and finally turned her into the street at one o'clock in the morning.

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Absolutely without resources, Alexandrine now wrote to the Minister to whose department the management of the Opera belonged, begging for an engagement, which, besides giving her means of subsistence, would rescue her from her husband's cruelty by placing her beyond his control. The following was the letter:—

“MONSEIGNEUR,—Alexandrine-Sophie Arnould begs you humbly to grant her your permission to be admitted as a singer into the Paris Opera. Her position as wife of the Sieur de Murville cannot be an obstacle to the engagement she wishes to accept. Married at the age of thirteen, she has since then known nothing but misery. Ill-treatment, cruelty, atrocious insults, there is nothing that the Sieur de Murville has not heaped upon her; and he has at last reduced her to the sad necessity of instituting formal complaints against him.

“But the chief motive of the petitioner is the state of indigence and misery to which the conduct of her husband has reduced her.

“He has no relations in Paris. He could not even name a friend. The little fortune he pos-

essed has been spent in gambling-houses. His furniture has been seized and sold. He now lives in furnished apartments, where he forces the petitioner, whom he had previously turned out of his house, to live with him: not, it may well be supposed, from affection, but in order to enjoy the little income still remaining from the petitioner's dowry. Deprived of this, she finds herself without dresses, linen, and often without bread. The said *Sieur de Murville* has even the cruelty to forbid her to receive the assistance which the affection of her mother has frequently offered her.

"Such a situation justifies everything, and the petitioner ventures to hope that the Minister whom she has the honour of addressing, touched by her unhappy fate, will not refuse her the only resource open to her."

Whether *Sophie Arnould's* daughter obtained the engagement for which she had applied does not appear; but the Minister can scarcely have rejected her prayer.

The Revolution was now at hand, and as soon

as, under the new legislation, it became possible for Alexandrine to obtain a divorce, she got one.

Will it be believed that Sophie Arnould—not from hypocrisy, for she had none in her nature—objected strongly to her daughter's obtaining a divorce? She herself had never been married, and she probably cherished a consoling belief that had she ever become a wife, she would have been a faithful one. Divorce she called seriously, but with her usual wit, "le sacrement de l'adultère."

Freed from [the cruelty of her profligate tyrant, Alexandrine was able to visit her mother, at whose house she was now a frequent, almost constant guest.

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## CHAPTER VI.

THE Revolution was as fatal to Sophie Arnould as to many of her aristocratic friends. Prince d'Hénin was brought to the guillotine. Count de Lauragais sought safety in retirement, and for a time, according to some authorities, in disguise.

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Even Bélanger, the architect, though not of the aristocratic class, was out of luck, while Sophie herself was reduced to poverty through the stoppage of her pension; first reduced to two thousand francs, and afterwards, from 1793, discontinued—not in any formal manner, but, as a matter of fact, left unpaid.

In a letter written soon afterwards, she refers in touching terms to the death of Prince d'Hénin, one of her oldest, though not one of her most cherished friends. She remained on the most amicable, the most affectionate terms with Lauragais and Bélanger, writing constantly to the latter, and visiting both him and his wife; for Sophie's architect was now married. She had said, at the time of her first relations with him, that her reputation being in ruins, she could find no more suitable man than an architect to restore it; and Bélanger certainly did his best to build up, not Sophie's reputation, but her fallen fortunes, at a time when she was greatly in need of his assistance.

Sophie, as may be remembered, had received a settlement from Count de Lauragais. But this

became valueless when noblemen had either to conceal themselves, or fly for their lives, and, as a punishment for their disappearance, had their estates confiscated.

Lauragais, in the days before the Revolution, had been a great reformer. One reads of the Utopian ideas which he had brought back with him from England, and some of his republican principles had been imbibed by Sophie. Apart from the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage, which she proclaimed as a dogma while disregarding it as a fact, Sophie, as from her rebellious nature might have been anticipated, was quite in favour of upsetting the ancient *régime*, though she was shocked and disgusted with the one by which it was immediately followed.

In her letters to Bélanger she addresses him habitually as "Mon bel ange," and one of them is superscribed, "A mon meilleur ami." Bélanger, on his side, writes to her, goes to see her, entertains her in the bosom of his family, and acts as intermediary between her and the Minister, or the director of the Opera, in order to gain payment and restitution of the pension to which she



is entitled. In one letter she sends him an affectionate kiss for his wife, which, if she does not like to accept it, she is to give back to him at once. Lauragais, who has become a shepherd, writes to her at the farm where she keeps fowls, proposing that he shall visit her, or that she shall come and visit him. One of her letters to Bélanger contains a charming poem on the subject of her grey hair. She was at this time in her sixtieth year. In her last letter to Lauragais, the last, at least, which has been preserved, she writes, in 1799, as under. She had now left the evacuated convent, and the chicken farm where she had lived for many years, and was at Paris. She dates her letter, as under penalty she was bound to do, "the fifth complementary day of the year 7," otherwise September 21st, 1799.

"What delight, my dear friend, your last letter gave to my heart. Its soft and tender expressions recalled to me the happy days of Dorval and of Sophie. To end my days near you, to render you all the attentions of the most affectionate, most constant attachment, is the desire

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of my heart, and will complete my happiness. But time, circumstances, and other things consequent thereupon, will prevent its being at Manicomp [where Lauragais had his farm].

"I have come to Paris for the allowance I receive from the Government, and which, moderate as it is, gives me the means of living, and of supporting the three children which the death of our Alexandrine has left to my charge. This is a sacred duty which I cannot but fulfil. In going to visit you, the happiness would be for me. My heart, my friend, is not changed; the good I have been able to do, and that which I still do, is all that remains to me. I know no happiness except through the past. It is impossible for me, you see, to go away. But you, my Dorval, you can come to me. Here you must fix your abode, and here you will find what you would seek in vain where you are, *besides your safety.*

"I do not know what view you take of our affairs and of our future. I see that there is a question once more of requisitions of all kinds: horses, forage, wheat, oats, brandy, etc., etc. They were already in force in the departments sur-

rounding the armies. The loan of a hundred millions; the law of hostages: these means appear, to people who reflect, to have been taken in order to ward off the blow which must come from our financial system. Either I am altogether wrong, or I fancy I see that people are beginning to get tired of the tortuous policy of the Directory . . . . If the coarse veil which covers the nullity of the Directory is torn aside by some catastrophe, or by the state of the finances, then where shall we be? You must see that there will be no party but that of the Jacobins which will be at all remarkable in the midst of twenty factions, useless for their own members, and very dangerous for everyone else. There is something for you to think about, my poor friend. I must have listened well, heard well, and, above all, must have had a strong desire to complete my views, in order to be able to say so much to you about a subject which, though I have just been studying it, is quite foreign to my habit of mind. I do not know whether in connection with this you will see clearly that the place you must live in, and the only one where you can live, is Paris. One must have

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money, you will say; but you have a little, and I have some also. We shall not have any great expenses to meet. No rent to pay: we must breakfast in the morning; for dinner, we must visit our friends. We will be moderate at their houses, and very moderate indeed at our own. I have also some wood at the Paraclete (the evacuated convent at which she had lived in the country), a portion of which I can have brought here. You said on this head all that was necessary to say, and so well, and with so much wit and grace, that there is nothing more to be said on the subject, except to thank you. To return to the point—to our means of living; well, my Dorval, we must help one another. We will take for our models Baucis and Philemon. Dorval will write the great wants of our Revolution: I will transmit to posterity those of my youth. That was a long time ago. But there are some things which one never forgets. The heart alone, my dear friend, has imperishable recollections. It is not, as you see, my will which decides our place of abode, for I, on my part, say with Ariadne: 'Le patrie est toujours où l'on voit ce qu'on aime.' I certainly do not regard the offers

you make me as a last resource. If my reflections looked like a refusal, and had the effect of prolonging the separation which troubles us both, I should be inconsolable. But, believe me, my friend, it is here you must come. Things cannot remain in the state which they have now reached, and it is perhaps important that you should form an opinion on this point for yourself. Citizens Loisel and Arnould are occupying themselves zealously with your affairs. But you must help them. You cannot be told in writing all that has to be said. One reflection leads to another, etc.

“If I had had the entire set of rooms, I should have been more pressing in my invitation. But I shall have them soon. It can only be a delay of a week or ten days at most; and I shall then prepare for you all that I can get for your need and comfort. You will have a fine large airy room, in a good position, where you will be alone and free, with a staircase and door to yourself, a good bed, chairs to match, a big table for your papers, writing materials, etc. I think, in a word, you will be at your ease. As for other matters, they will be quite satisfactory. I have for ser-

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vant a woman about thirty years old—unmarried, not too intelligent, but who works and does her duty. Servants of intelligence are too much given to intrigue, etc. We must avoid all this for the present, and for good reasons. But do not, my friend, be in any trouble about yourself, I shall be always at your service, and shall always say,—

‘Qu’on est hereux de déchausser ce qu’on aime !’

Farewell. I will let you know as soon as the rooms are ready. That will not be long ; and no excuses for not being able to come! Again, farewell!

“ *To the Citizen BRANCAS LAURAGAIS,  
Proprietor and Cultivator at Manicamp,  
Par Chauny,  
Département de L’Aisne.*”

The original letters of Sophie Arnould are in the hands of various collectors of autographs, and they have for the most part been reproduced by M. de Goncourt in his interesting work on the life and letters of Sophie Arnould, already several times referred to and extracted from. Lauragais’ answer to Sophie has not been preserved ; but we know from other sources that Lauragais left his

farm and went to Paris. According to M. Castil-Blaze, he was at Paris throughout the Reign of Terror: on the principle, no doubt, that when one is being looked for, the safest place is in a crowd. Castil-Blaze bears a good reputation for accuracy of statement; and evidence to this effect has been given in one of his learned and ingenious books by M. Edouard Fournier, author of *Le Vieux-Neuf, L'Esprit dans l'Histoire ou les Mots Historiques, etc.*, of whom Jules Janin once happily said: "Cet homme sait tout; mais il le sait bien."

The said Castil-Blaze gives, in his *Académie Royale de Musique*, many details about Sophie Arnould's life in Paris at a time when both she and Lauragais were living there, though whether in the same house does not clearly appear. Lauragais is said, during the Reign of Terror, to have disguised himself as a coachman, and to have driven for hire. Castil-Blaze tells an anecdote, too, of a nobleman, an old friend of Lauragais, who once took the vehicle, and ordered the aristocrat turned coachman to drive him home. At the end of the journey, Lauragais was offered his fare, but returned it, saying: "The Count de Lauragais does

not take money from the Chevalier de —— for driving him home." The two friends shook hands and exchanged confidences; and the Chevalier insisted, in his turn, on driving Lauragais home. This exchange of civilities could not be carried on indefinitely; and Lauragais, says Castil-Blaze, asked his old friend to breakfast with him next morning at Sophie Arnould's.

According to Sophie's letter to Lauragais, cited above, it was in 1799, under the Directory, that Lauragais was asked to share her set of rooms in Paris. But how long did the Reign of Terror last? Sophie writes cautiously, even in a tone of alarm; while she warns Lauragais that his personal safety is the first thing to be considered. Castil-Blaze speaks, moreover, of an interview between Sophie Arnould and the Minister of Police, Fouché, who had once greatly admired her, and who, in her distress, obtained for her either a new pension or a payment on account of the old one. No particulars on this subject are given by M. de Goncourt, who, fastidious on some points, and the reverse of fastidious on others, may ignore them either as insufficiently authenticated, or merely



because no mention of them is made in Sophie's letters, which occupy a good half of his book.

The most interesting thing to know, the most important fact to consider, in connection with Sophie's last days, is that she was not deserted by all her friends, but, on the contrary, from two of them (a large proportion) received unremitting care, and every possible proof of affection. Lauragais—the Dorval of the year 1757—was always at her service. So, too, was the architect Bélanger, and even Bélanger's wife. Prince d'Hénin had lost his head on the scaffold, and many of Sophie's friends in early life must have met with the same fate. Many of them, too, must have been in exile. Except, then, by those who believe in the gratitude of all men, it cannot be said that Sophie, in her old age, and on her bed of sickness, was treated ungratefully.

Her two best, most devoted friends, Lauragais and Bélanger, had both been reduced to poverty. Bélanger, in one of his letters, wishes her "health, happiness, and not too great an appetite;" and we have seen, from one of her letters to Lauragais, that she scarcely expected, except

when she could dine with a friend, to have more than one meal a day. Recklessly extravagant as she had been in her youth, she could in her old age content herself with the simplest necessities of life, and the affection of a few old friends. A letter has already been quoted in which Lauragais protests against the production of a vaudeville apparently based on some incidents in Sophie Arnould's early life; and in which he lays stress on her determination, in spite of his pressing request, not to publish memoirs which, without compromising anyone not already compromised (himself, in the first place), might bring her in some money.

Bélangier, when she was in the greatest distress, begged her to accept, as from an old friend, a piece of two louis, which he at the same time forwarded to her. She replied that she would not receive his money, that she did not need it, but that she was deeply obliged to him for his thoughtfulness, and, in memory thereof, would wear the gold piece next her heart. At this very time, January 1800, she was addressing a letter to Lucien Bonaparte, Minister of the Interior,

imploing him for a substantial renewal of a pension which, often granted, seems rarely to have been paid. She tells him that in her young days she had gone to the Opera "without being destined for it, and impelled only by chance, which governs so many things." She had received, she said, her artistic education from the best professors, and had been aided by the counsels of people of taste and learning, by men of deserved celebrity. "As for myself," she continues, "my only recommendations were a suitable physique, an abundant youth, vivacity, soul, a bad head, and a good heart. With such advantages I was fortunate enough to obtain distinction, and to gain, together with a certain sort of celebrity, fortune and many friends. Now, alas, Chance has turned against me. As for celebrity, my name is still cited with some praise in association with those of Psyche, Iphigenia, Egle and Pomona; in a word, at the Théâtre des Arts"—the new name given to the theatre, which could no longer be called Académie Royale. "As for my friends, I may say that I so well deserved them, that I have only lost those whom death has carried off, and those of whom the decemviral axe

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has deprived me. Is it not cruel, Citizen Minister, that after so much happiness, I should find myself reduced to such misery; that after kindling so many fires, I should be without a log to burn on my own hearth?—for the fact is, that ever since I inscribed my name on the sheets of the Pension List, I have had no sheets to my bed.”

A former Minister, one of Sophie’s latest admirers, for a time her enemy, but afterwards her sincere friend, had made her a grant at the rate of two hundred francs a month, which, like all previous allowances, soon came to an end. She now begged Lucien Bonaparte to renew this pension of eight pounds a month; and Lucien Bonaparte did so; though, like all the others, it soon ceased to be paid, and Sophie has to write, now to the director of the Théâtre des Arts, then to Chaptal, and afterwards to Cellerier, Lucien Bonaparte’s successor at the Ministry of Fine Arts. This time something closely resembling a swindle seems to have been perpetrated to her disadvantage. The artists of the theatre had got up a performance for her benefit, and she had ceded her share of the profits to the

Administration for six thousand francs. Part of this she was unable to obtain.

Bélanger's last letter, like the last letter of Lauragais, was written when Sophie was already on her deathbed. "Citizen Minister," he wrote, "I address this letter to you alone. I write it from the bedside of the celebrated Arnould, now on the point of death. [She did not die until four months afterwards.] This woman is dying in want of necessaries which her distressed condition does not enable her to procure. You granted her a benefit performance at the Théâtre des Arts, for which obliging persons offered her twelve thousand francs. You afterwards desired that your promise should be withdrawn, and in exchange offered six thousand francs. She has received four thousand; the two thousand which are still due would be of the greatest assistance to her. But whom am I to address in order that your promise may be fulfilled? The responsible cashier of the theatre declares that he must have special orders from you, without which he can hand over nothing; and this unfortunate woman, of whom Gluck said, 'Without the charm of the accents and declamation of

Mdlle. Arnould, my *Iphigenia* would never have been accepted in France'—this unhappy woman finds herself now without even the means of prolonging her life. What would the Moncrifs, the Rousseaus, the d'Alemberts, the Diderots, what would Helvetius, the Baron d'Holbach have said—those celebrated men who so courted her society, and who have spoken of her in their correspondence? What would Voltaire himself have said, who, at the age of eighty-four, had himself conveyed to her house, and there traced these verses on her bust?

“Ses grâces, ses talents ont illustré son nom ;  
Elle a su tout charmer, jusqu'à la jalousie.  
Alcibiade en elle eût cru voir Aspasia,  
Maurice, Lecouvreur, et Gourville, Ninon.”\*

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\* Far wittier is the epitaph on Adrienne Lecouvreur attributed to Voltaire, but which, according to Favart (*Mémoires et Correspondance Littéraires*, Vol. I. p. 172), was the work of the Chevalier de Rochemort :—

“L'opinion étoit si forte  
Qu'elle devoit toujours durer ;  
Qu'après même qu'elle fut morte,  
On refusa de l'enterrer.”

"This woman, now so utterly forsaken, was once surrounded by men of wit and learning. She lived to relieve the wants of the unfortunate; she lived to leave models and pupils to the stage which she embellished, and even created. Eminent writers have immortalised her talent and her wit; and yet this woman is dying from inability to purchase the necessary remedies for the tortures she is enduring."

On the 22d of October, 1802, Sophie Arnould died at the age of sixty-two. On her deathbed she received absolution from the Curé of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois. She was buried in the cemetery of Montmartre. No record has been preserved of her funeral.

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## CHAPTER VII.

THE bust of Sophie Arnould, on which Voltaire wrote the four verses cited in the previous chapter, was apparently the one which, on receiving a visit from some Government agents during the Reign

of Terror, she caused to be mistaken, or which, according to another version of the story, was spontaneously mistaken by the agents themselves for the bust of Marat. Castil-Blaze, on this point evidently wrong, speaks of it as a bust of Gluck, for whom, however much she may have esteemed him as a composer, she, for reasons abundantly set forth in previous chapters, could have entertained no personal regard. "You are a good citoyenne," the agents are reported to have said, "or you would not have the bust of Marat in your room."

This may be the place for presenting some of Sophie Arnould's most celebrated witticisms. They are all to be found (together with some which can scarcely be authenticated as Sophie's) in the collection called *Arnouldiana*. Some of them lose greatly by not being given in connection with the circumstances which called them forth.

Sophie had, of course, plenty of sharp things to say of her rivals. It was of Rosalie, to whom had been assigned the principal part in Gluck's *Alceste* which, in the ordinary course, would have been given to Sophie, and whose voice is



said to have been marred by a certain vulgarity, that she said: "She ought to succeed. Elle a la voix du peuple."

To an actress who could not speak her own language, and who complained that she was overwhelmed by the number of her admirers, Sophie said: "You might so easily get rid of them. You have only to say a word."

When Mdle. Laguerre appeared as Iphigenia in Piccinni's *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Sophie, noticing that her rival was affected by wine, exclaimed: "This is not Iphigenia in Tauris; this is Iphigenia in Champagne."

She called Madeleine Guimard, the dancer, "La squelette des grâces;" and, seeing her in a *pas de trois*, as a nymph between two fauns, that it reminded her of two dogs fighting for a bone.

In further reference to Madeleine Guimard's notorious thinness, she said that, when Madeleine

was dancing, it was not necessary to go to Saint Cloud, "pour voir jouer les eaux" (les os).

Beaumarchais had brought out at the Théâtre Français a not very successful piece called *Les Deux Amis*, and happening to say, a few days afterwards, that he was afraid the theatre would not be very full, Sophie replied: "Vos *Deux Amis* nous en enverront."

Lauragais, to Sophie's great vexation, was paying much attention to a young actress, who, he said, received constant visits from a certain Knight of Malta. "Il est là pour chasser les infidèles," remarked Sophie.

The story of Sophie Arnould's meeting a physician armed with a gun, and saying to him: "Are you afraid, then, that your prescriptions will not be sufficient," has also been told of others.

On hearing of a gentleman who had had two wives, the first rich and faithful, the second poor

and inconstant, Sophie Arnould exclaimed: "How curious has been the fate of this husband: his first wife brought him the horn of plenty, his second plenty of horns."

An old actress of the Opera, wishing to claim her pension, drew up a petition which she intended to present to the Minister of the Interior, but first consulted Sophie Arnould as to its style and phraseology. "Monseigneur," it began, "Autrefois je chantais." "That is no use," said Sophie, whom the words reminded of one of La Fontaine's fables. "If you say, 'Autrefois je chantais,' he will reply, 'Eh bien; dansez maintenant.'"

A certain Marquis had been thrashed with a walking stick, but showed no disposition to take vengeance on his castigator. "How can he overlook the matter?" someone inquired. "Bah," replied Sophie, "he has the good sense to take no notice of what takes place behind his back."

Mdlle. Peslin, a dancer at the Opera, who was addicted to gallantry, took offence at remarks made

concerning her by Sophie Arnould, and requested Sophie in future to say nothing about her, either good or bad. "Ah, my dear," replied Sophie, "I shall never be able to obey more than half your command."

Mdlle. Doligny, the actress, possessed a character for virtue which belonged to few of her stage associates. A certain marquis laid siege to her in the way of gallantry; but finding her impregnable, went so far as to offer her marriage. This, she likewise refused, saying that she had too good an opinion of herself to be his mistress, but too poor a one to become his wife. This led someone to remark that woman was an unaccountable being. "Woman," replied Sophie Arnould, "is a great child who is amused with toys, lulled to sleep with flatteries, and seduced with promises. Doligny will one day succumb like the rest."

Of a certain chevalier, who was tall and empty-headed, Sophie remarked that he resembled those houses of which the highest storey was the worst furnished.

One day, as she related, she met a chorus singer, leading by the hand a little child. "What a pretty girl," exclaimed Sophie; "whose is it, mademoiselle?" "It is mine," replied the vocalist. "Why," said Sophie, "you are not married?" "No, mademoiselle; but I belong to the Opera."

That Sophie appreciated Gluck's merits has already been seen. At the time of the Gluck and Piccinni disputes a violent Piccinnist said one day to Sophie: "You see, mademoiselle, that the illusion about Gluck is at length destroyed, and that his music has fallen." "Fallen from the heavens," was Sophie's reply.

When the Prince d'Hénin first began to bore Sophie with his attentions, she repelled him with a studied and provoking silence. He found it impossible to extract a single word from her, until one day she opened her mouth to utter the following observation: "You see, monseigneur, it is sometimes as difficult to make a woman speak as to make her hold her tongue."

The poet Sedaine paid Sophie a visit just after a certain tragedy of his had failed on the stage. He explained its failure by saying that the time for its production had been miscalculated. "The pear was not yet ripe," he added. "No," replied Sophie; "but that did not prevent its falling."

Of the poet Dorat she said: "This little Dorat resembles a column of marble; he is dry, cold and polished."

A certain chevalier, who made love to Sophie, swore that if she would but once yield to his importunity he would repay her with eternal devotion. "Your passion," replied Sophie, "deceives you. A woman whose favours a man seeks is like an enigma of which people are eager to find the solution; no sooner is the secret known than all interest ceases."

In allusion to the extraordinary good-luck enjoyed by the poet Beaumarchais, not only in literature but in his commercial speculations, and indeed everything else, Sophie observed: "Beaumarchais

will in the end be hanged, but the rope will break."

An elderly woman of Sophie's acquaintance had married a mere stripling. "What an absurd alliance for her to make," someone remarked to Sophie. "No," was the reply; "she understands these matters. She knows quite well that before fire can be kindled dry sticks must be placed beneath the green wood."

"It is strange," remarked someone to Sophie, "that the passion of love is as strong in a widow as in a young girl within whose breast the fire has just for the first time been lighted. Now the widow has not the excuse of the young girl, namely, intense curiosity." "No; but confirmed habit," replied Sophie.

Alexandrine, Sophie Arnould's daughter, who made such an unfortunate marriage, and afterwards, under the Republic, obtained a divorce, enjoyed a high reputation for decorum, so that her name was entirely free from scandal. Alexandrine

happened to be carrotty; and when someone ungraciously suggested to Sophie that this perhaps explained her daughter's exemption from danger, Sophie, with a laugh, replied: "Yes; her strength, like Samson's, is in her hair."

A certain rich financier of Sophie's acquaintance suffered very much from cold hands. "That is strange," she remarked, "since he always has them in other people's pockets."



## MADemoisELLE DE CAMARGO.

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At the beginning of the eighteenth century the ballet in France was a solemn ceremony imposed on the public by fashion rather than a diversion in which they took delight. It still, indeed, remained in vogue; for Louis XIV. himself, in his moments of majestic buffoonery, had deigned to step from the throne and display his talents as a dancer to the jaded and yawning Court.

In 1725 there were three kinds of ballet, "the noble, the comic, and the pastoral." Each was more depressing than the other. The drawling music, the mechanical attitudes and gestures, the languishing poses of the head, evoked sighs and

yawns from that portion of the audience which had not the good fortune to be asleep. At that time, indeed, there was not a dancer on the stage who understood her art. Dancing was imagined to consist in waves and flourishes of the arms. Suddenly, however, appeared a ballerina who danced with her legs. This was at once a revelation and a revolution.

Marie-Anne de Cuppi was sixteen years of age when she made her *début*. She was born at Brussels on the 15th of April 1710. By her father, she was descended from the illustrious Cuppi family, which could claim among its members a bishop, an archbishop, and several minor dignitaries of the Roman Church. By her grandmother, she belonged to the noble Spanish house of Camargo.

The father of this illustrious dancer, Ferdinand-Joseph de Cuppi, otherwise Camargo, was himself born at Brussels, and was left an orphan at an early age. Deprived of immense family inheritances by his mother's negligence, by law-suits, misfortunes, and the ravages of war, he found himself reduced to extreme poverty, with hereditary pride as the sole consolation which remained

to him. He would rather, it is said, have died than degrade himself by turning a sou in a manner unworthy of his ancestors. Fortunately he saw nothing derogatory to his illustrious descent in a talent he happened to possess for the violin; and with this instrument he at length set up as a dancing-master. Nor did he find it difficult to procure a sufficient number of pupils.

One day the dancing-master fell in love with a beautiful young girl, high-born like himself, but equally poor. With nothing to offer but his name, he nevertheless married her. She, on her side, brought him no dowry; but, by way of compensation, made him, in the course of a few years, a present of seven children.

The youngest but one was Marie-Anne. When only a few months old she had already inspired her father with magnificent hopes; for she would instinctively dance in her nurse's arms to the strains of the paternal violin, and even dance in time. Thenceforth Ferdinand-Joseph de Cuppi saw that his child would prove an illustrious ballerina, and devoted his whole care to the development of her precocious talent.

The pains he took were soon to be rewarded. At the age of eleven Marie-Anne danced so prettily in drawing-rooms that the Princess de Ligne and a few art-patronising Court ladies decided that it would be a sin to withhold the little prodigy from the applause of the public. It was resolved, therefore, that she should go to Paris to receive lessons from Mdlle. Prévost, then the queen of the Opera. To this end the ladies raised a fund from their own purses, and a few days afterwards Ferdinand-Joseph de Cuppi, with his pocket full of money, and in the most amiable humour, installed himself in a comfortable carriage, and set out with his little daughter for the capital.

At Paris, on the recommendation of the Princess de Ligne, Prince d'Isenghen and Count de Middelbourg used their influence on the child's behalf, and, in company with M. de Cuppi, presented her to Mdlle. Prévost, who promised that, under her tuition, the little pupil should soon overcome all the difficulties and mysteries of the art.

After three months' instruction Marie-Anne returned to Brussels, made her first appearance at the theatre, and obtained a great success.

Soon afterwards a first engagement was proposed to her. Pélissier, director of the theatre at Rouen, was at the time in want of some novelty which would draw the public; and, having heard of the young prodigy, he entered into negotiations with her father. The dancing-master, however, hesitated to close with Pélissier's offer. He did not wish his daughter to go unaccompanied to Rouen; nor could he afford to follow her on so long a journey with his wife and family. At Rouen, too, he would have no means of livelihood. But everything was in the end arranged. It was agreed that one of the brothers of the dancer should play the violin in the orchestra, and that the father, besides playing in the orchestra, should give lessons to the ballet pupils at the Rouen theatre. To Rouen, then, the Cuppi family proceeded to migrate.

The young ballerina obtained a great success. But, unfortunately, Pélissier, an open-handed man of pleasure, was a bad manager. One day he found his exchequer empty: it was impossible to carry on the theatre. Ruin stared M. Cuppi and his tribe in the face.

Just then, however, fortune came to their aid. Francine, violinist at the Opera, where he was about to become director, visited Rouen at this juncture, expressly to offer Mdlle. de Cuppi a *début* at the Académie Royale de Musique. With the parental sanction, he promptly carried her off; and on 5th May 1726 she made her first appearance at the Opera, in an extremely difficult part, and under the name of Camargo, by which she was henceforth to be known.

Her success was phenomenal. Each new movement in the dance was received with a louder thunder of applause. Her youth, her jet black eyes, her childlike feet, her dainty skirt, by no means of prodigious length, everything conspired to drive the audience wild with delight. The next day seats could scarcely be secured, except at the point of the sword; and half the ladies in Paris had arranged their toilette and dressed their hair in the style of Camargo.

Not that the ballerina was at all beautiful. She was, indeed, downright ugly. A contemporary describes her as "a real monster, like her predecessor, Mdlle. Prévost." Noverre was hardly

more complimentary. "I have seen Mdle. Camargo dance," he wrote. "Those critics are entirely wrong who have lent her certain graces; for Nature has denied her every imaginable grace. She is neither tall, nor pretty, nor well formed."

Yet the moment she began to dance, everyone forgot her face. No one, indeed, had time to see whether she was beautiful or ugly, so light and lively was she upon her feet. Her leaps and curves and twirls positively bewildered the transported audience. And, indeed, when she was dancing, her countenance became transfigured. Her black eyes were then full of smiles and provocations; her laughing lips revealed the beauty of her ivory teeth. She did not seem to dance for the applause of the public, but by force of instinct, and for her own delight.

The foot of Camargo was one of the wonders of the eighteenth century. It made the fame and fortune of her shoemaker Choisy. All the ladies of the Court and of the capital resorted to this illustrious cobbler who made such delicious little shoes.

One important element in her success was, according to some critics, the extreme brevity of her

skirt. She was the first dancer who had ventured to curtail this garment to the point at which it was afterwards to be maintained; and loud were the exclamations which this piece of daring on her part evoked from a section of the public.

"Camargo," says Grimm, "was the first who ventured to shorten her skirt. This useful invention, which enables the connoisseur to judge as to the true art of the dancer, seemed likely to occasion a very dangerous schism. The Jansenists in the pit cried heresy and scandal, and could not endure the curtailed skirt. The Molinists, on the other hand, maintained that this innovation approached nearer to the spirit of the primitive church, which objected to seeing the artistic movements of the dancer hampered by the length of her vestments.

In the end, after many disputes, Mdlle. Camargo and her short skirt carried the day. The next year, however, in 1727, the inconveniencies of this innovation already began to reveal themselves. A young ballerina named Mariette had her vestments torn away by a piece of projecting framework; and after this disaster an order was issued by the



Commissary of Police forbidding "any actress or dancer to appear on the stage without a caleçon."

Meanwhile the incredible success of Mdlle. Camargo had seriously alarmed her mistress. Mdlle. Prévost felt herself surpassed by her young pupil, and was much concerned how to dispose of so dangerous a rival. As she could not outshine her, she determined to drive her, if possible, from the stage, or at least to keep her to obscure parts, in which her talent would be lost and forgotten. As a first step, she refused to continue those lessons by which the girl had already too greatly profited; then, by force of intrigue, she managed to banish her into the stage background, and even at times entirely to prevent her appearance. On one occasion she went so far as to refuse her a dance in which Mme. de Berry had expressly desired to see the young artist.

With such an enemy at work, Mdlle. Camargo might all her life have remained lost in some back row of ballet dancers. By a fine piece of ingenuity, however, she suddenly contrived to spring once more to the foremost rank, whence she was never afterwards to be displaced.

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One evening she had to figure in a company of demons, who at a given moment were to march in upon the stage from the wings. Immediately upon their entrance Dumoulin was to dance a solo. When, however, the demons had trooped in, and the orchestra had already struck up the air of the dance in question, Dumoulin had not yet appeared. By a sudden inspiration Camargo quitted her place, sprang to the middle of the stage, improvised the step of the absent ballerina, and danced so magnificently that the whole house was enraptured.

This victory redoubled the enmity of Mdlle. Prévost, but, on the other hand, it procured the favour of Blondi. Under the direction of this professor, Camargo rapidly improved, above all in correctness. She was now reported to be in love with her dancing-master; and the report threw Mdlle. Prévost, on this point likewise her rival, into the last state of fury and despair.

A letter written at the time by Adrienne Lecouvreur is interesting in this connection. "Yesterday," she says, "they played *Roland*, by Quinault and Lulli. Mdlle. Prévost, although she surpassed herself, obtained very meagre applause

in comparison with a new dancer named Camargo, whom the public idolise, and whose great merit is youth and vigour. I doubt whether you have seen her. Mdle. Prévost at first protected her; but Blondi has fallen in love with her, and the lady is therefore piqued. She seemed jealous and discontented at the applause Camargo received from the public, and this applause has at length reached such a point of wild enthusiasm that Prévost will be very foolish if she does not decide to retire."

Within two years from this time Mdle. Camargo had not only brought her talents to the last point of perfection, she had even revolutionised the ballet, and introduced an entirely new order of dancing. The old *courant*, the old *saraband*, had gone out of fashion. The public no longer yawned and slept through an ordeal of mere grimaces and attitudes; they crowded to the ballet to watch the feet of Camargo, and every eye was strained in the endeavour to follow them in their capricious, lightning-like movements.

Her greatest triumph is said to have been a cer-

tain minuet step, which she executed from the edge of the footlights to the very back of the stage. Every night the public awaited this passage with impatience. Many people attended the Opera solely to witness this miracle of skill, and, after applauding wildly, would quit the theatre as soon as the dancer had finished.

Such was now the renown of Mdle. Camargo that ovations awaited her even outside the theatre. One evening she had just quitted the theatre, and was promenading in the Tuileries Gardens, when she was saluted by the wife of Marshal de Villars, who stood chatting with her for a full quarter of an hour. Meanwhile, all who were strolling in the gardens had crowded round the two women, in a circle, and clapped their hands, as much to testify their admiration for the dancer as to show Mme. de Villars how highly they esteemed her affability.

One last word must be added as to the talent of Camargo. Although she made such a free use of her legs, and took such leaps into the air as no ballerina had ever done before, yet

her dancing was particularly distinguished by decorum. She had so adroit a way of keeping her feet beneath her that her leg was never visible above the knee.

Thence arose much speculation on the part of the frequenters of the ballet. Did she, they asked themselves, or did she not, conform to the order of the police and wear a *caleçon*? The question was as grave as it was delicate. Some said that she did, some maintained that she did not. Two opposite factions were soon formed on the disputed point. During whole months hundreds of eyes incessantly watched for some false movement on her part which might reveal the actual truth. But no false movement did she make. At length, unable any longer to restrain their impatience, the two factions sent a deputation to Mdlle. Camargo to elicit from her the positive facts of the case.

She replied, it is said, "with a beautiful blush, and with eyes modestly lowered," that without such a "precaution," she would never have dared to appear on the stage. This ended the dispute; and there is little doubt but that it was in memory

of Camargo's reply that for a long time afterwards the caleçon bore at the Académie Royal de Musique the name of "precaution."

"With her laughs, her smiles, her arch gaiety, Camargo," wrote one of her admirers, "seems on the stage to be the very priestess of pleasure and of love." But no sooner had she retired into the wings than all this false exaltation vanished. She was, as a rule, melancholy, and even sad. Her countenance was expressive of the "profoundest ennui." Her wit has sometimes been mentioned; but, as a matter of fact, she hardly ever opened her mouth. At the theatre she addressed scarcely a word to any of her associates.

Her demeanour was one of "frigid dignity," and she seems indeed to have cultivated this demeanour as becoming in the descendant of an archbishop who had wandered to the Opera. Nevertheless, she had scarcely a single enemy at the theatre, with the exception of Mdlle. Prévost. As she was good-natured and obliging, her associates were indulgent to her peculiarities, and avoided making too much fun of the hereditary airs which she was accustomed to display.

We have seen that rumour credited her with a passion for her dancing-master Blondi. This was perhaps a mere piece of conjecture; and for a long time, in any case, it furnished the only tale that could be told or invented in connection with her name.

At length, however, amongst the crowd of admirers who already surrounded her, and who were frozen off one after the other by her arctic demeanour, she conceived a fancy for the Count de Melun, who had long and persistently paid his court. The meetings which took place between them were hazardous, and required great circumspection; for M. de Cuppi, like an excellent father, watched his daughter with affectionate vigilance. This supervision weighed so heavily upon Count de Melun that he at last suggested an elopement, and the ballerina gave her consent.

One fine night, in the month of May, everything was arranged for the intended flight, when, at the last moment, an unforeseen obstacle presented itself. Mdle. Camargo had a young sister named Sophie, thirteen years of age, who likewise danced at the Opera. Sophie, seeing that her sister was

about to be carried off, wished to be carried off as well.

The Count at first refused point-blank. But the little girl vowed with such determination to raise an alarm unless she too were eloped with, that the Count ultimately gave his consent. He made off with the two sisters, and conveyed them to his hotel in the Rue des Cultures-Saint-Gervais.

Terrible on the morrow was the indignation of M. de Cuppi. Where should he look for justice against so odious a piece of violence? The importance of the case seemed to require an appeal to the highest authority; and he accordingly addressed to his excellency Cardinal Fleury the following petition:—

Ferdinand-Joseph de Cuppi, otherwise Camargo, seigneur of Renoussart, represents with deep respect to His Eminence that,—

“Unable to maintain his hereditary rank, and burdened with six children, he has sighed indeed, yet without an audible murmur. He has endeavoured to develop the peculiar talents of his



children, and to perfect them in those liberal arts which might, without derogation from their native position, enable them to supply the wants of life, and escape from misery, until some happier fortune should fall to their lot. He has had one child instructed in music, a second in painting, whilst others have been taught to dance. Of these last he would mention two, aged respectively eighteen and thirteen years.

“As the late King, of glorious memory, decreed that anyone might join the Opera without loss of dignity, the petitioner, under the persuasion, and even constraint, of persons who had perceived the bent of his eldest daughter, could not but consent to her employment at the Opera, although he made it a condition that either he or his wife should accompany her whenever she attended the theatre, and likewise conduct her home after the performance. In a word, this eldest daughter, who has now danced for three years at the Opera, has always behaved without reproach, and this conduct has been no less universally admired than her talent.

“But, throughout these three years, Count de

Melun has incessantly attempted all modes of perversion, unlike unworthy of himself and of the petitioner.

“At length the Count found means to invade, on several occasions, the apartments of his daughters, and ultimately, on the night of the 10th of May, carried off the two daughters in question, whom he at this moment retains at his Paris hotel in the Rue de la Couture-Saint-Gervais.

“The applicant, thus dishonoured no less than his daughters, would have taken proceedings through the ordinary channel had the offender been a mere private individual; and the laws established by His Majesty and his august predecessors are to the effect that such a rape should be punished with death. It is a double crime. Two sisters are carried off, aged respectively eighteen and thirteen years.

“But the applicant, having to do with a person of Count de Melun’s rank, is obliged to have recourse to other legislation; and he hopes that the King, in his bounty, will do justice in the case, and command Count de Melun both to marry his eldest daughter and to furnish the younger with a dowry.

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"In this way alone can he repair such a shameful injury."

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The petition seems to have had but little effect. Although the youngest daughter, Sophie, soon afterwards returned to her father's house, Marie-Anne, freed by the rules of the Opera from parental constraint, remained at the Count's hotel. The Count, nevertheless, failed to marry her; and the attachment she had felt for him was ere long transferred to other admirers.

Already she had excited the devotion of the Marquis de Sourdis, who was ruining himself in magnificent presents, when Count de Clermont fell violently in love with her.

Louis de Bourbon, Count de Clermont, son of Louis III., Prince de Condé, was one of the most remarkable figures of the eighteenth century. He was half priest, half soldier. A prince of the blood, he was, at the same time, abbot of no less than six rich monasteries; and, furnished with a brief from the Pope, he led three regiments to battle. He was, moreover, an academician, and

one of the first Grand Masters of Freemasonry in France.

It was he who, reversing the exclamation of Charles V., declared that it was "more difficult to discipline monks than soldiers." He was in his element rather on the field than in the monastery, and with a sword in his hand never failed to show that through his veins ran the blood of Condé. His valour at the battle of Raucoux was celebrated in these lines, with which all Paris resounded at the time :—

" Deux Clermonts ont été présents à cette affaire ;  
L'abbé parut combattre en brave militaire,  
Et le militaire en abbé."

The monkish colonel was fifty-five years of age when the flashing black eyes of Camargo kindled a flame within his breast. He was already, at this time, the lover of two other women, Mdle. Quoniam and the Duchess de Bouillon ; but, in his devotion to the ballerina, he disengaged himself from both, ceding the first to his nephew, Prince de Condé, and the second to the Marquis de Sourdis. In the latter case however, it was a simple matter of exchange.

Count de Clermont, long accustomed to scatter his vast monastic revenues to the four winds of his caprices, now lavished his whole fortune upon Mdlle. Camargo. He could refuse her nothing; or, rather, he never left her time to conceive a wish which he had not instantly gratified. The wealth which accrued from his abbeys he found inadequate. He ran into debt. When he could no longer borrow, he played stratagems in order to obtain money from his mother.

Monterif, the Count's steward, even lost his place by refusing to aid in the deceptions practised to this end by his master.

"Several causes," says one writer, "have been assigned for the disgrace of M. de Monterif. The facts of the case are these. The mother having requested from him a statement of the Count's most urgent debts, he drew up the paper with his master. It only showed a total sum of fifty thousand francs, and His Highness told the steward that he must concoct another statement, so as to bring the amount up to eighty thousand, and that the surplus would serve as a present to Camargo. But Monterif abused

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his master's confidence, and revealed the plot to the Duchess."

What could be more exquisite than the phrase, "abused his master's confidence," as literally translated!

Careless of his rank, and of the duties of his position, the Count seemed to take a pleasure in exhibiting himself to the whole world with his latest mistress. But his affection for her was something more than a caprice; it was an absolute passion. One night Mdle. Camargo, having endeavoured to outshine herself on the stage, was seriously prostrated by her unwonted exertions. The Count was forthwith in despair, and would yield to no one the duty of watching by the couch on which the invalid lay.

His affection was returned. If the Count happened to go away, the dancer was inconsolable, sat at her toilette the whole evening, and vowed that she would never dance again till the return of her beloved abbé.

The Count's passion grew at length so fastidious that he was even jealous of the public and their applause. He wished to have Camargo entirely to

himself; and he now withdrew her from the stage, to the despair of the frequenters of the ballet, who looked round in vain for a successor.

Later on, in 1737, not content with the six rich abbeys he already possessed, the Count wished to acquire that of Saint Germain-des-Prés, with a revenue of sixty thousand francs. To this end, he was prepared to make some sacrifice to public opinion, and, above all, to the wishes of the Court. He appeared, therefore, suddenly seized with a fit of devotion, and separated himself from his mistress. "M. de Clermont," it was said, "is in retirement, and no one knows what has become of Camargo." The Count soon afterwards spread the report that, arrested by the King's orders, Camargo had just been immured at Sainte-Pélagie; but this rumour seems to have obtained but little credence with the public.

Nor did the coveted abbey show any signs of arriving; and the Count, tired at length of his seclusion, threw himself once more into the arms of his mistress, before the eyes of all Paris. At this time she greatly desired to return to the Opera; but the Count would not hear of the project.

"Camargo," said a writer, "is doing her utmost to get back to the stage; but Count de Clermont stubbornly opposes her desire. He is so much in love with her that he is even jealous of the pleasures the public share with him in seeing her dance. This is carrying delicacy rather far. It is, nevertheless, his only motive. She, on her side, has contrived to make the sacrifice pay. The Count has just sold to the King his duchy of Châteauroux for the sum of two million six hundred thousand francs, and has made Camargo a present of a hundred thousand."

But this insinuation of cupidity on the part of Mdle. Camargo is hardly justified by the Count's present of a small fraction of the price he obtained for his duchy. Indeed, this same writer goes on to say that a word from the ballerina, would have secured the entire sum. The Count could refuse her nothing, and his whole life was one incessant attempt to please her. He could not endure her absence for an hour, and when by chance they were temporarily separated, his sole consolation was to surround himself with her portraits.



At length the longed-for Abbey of Saint-Germain passed into the Count's possession. But already his love was on the wane. Mdle. Camargo did not long enjoy the charms of the Château de Berney, the delightful country mansion attached to the abbey, where the Count laughed defiance at public opinion, and at the jesters and song writers of the day.

“Clermont de rien ne se soucie,  
Pourvu qu'il caresse sa mie ;  
Et bon, bon, je t'en réponds,  
S'il l'entretient des biens de l'église,  
Sanchez en cela l'autorise ;  
Et son, son, son ! Ah ! voyez donc !—  
Un peu de tricherie dans la vie  
Est toujours de saison.”

At Berney the Count hastened to erect a theatre, and to collect a troupe of dancers. Here Mdle. Camargo herself danced again, to the delight of the enraptured monks. But, in the meantime, an obscure member of the ecclesiastical ballet troupe, Mdle. le Duc, had stolen the affections of Count de Clermont.

Mdle. Camargo found herself now at liberty to return to the Opera, and there, in 1740, she made

her reappearance. But a formidable stage rival had risen up in her absence; and with this new favourite, Mdle. Sallé, Camargo had henceforth to share the applause of the public.

Between these two dancers a war without mercy was incessantly waged. Their two styles, however, were widely different. While Camargo leaped higher and higher from the stage, to astonish and dazzle her audience, Sallé danced lower and slower, but with graces of movement to the last degree seductive. It was a dance of elevation on the one hand, and of expression on the other.

In vain were attempts made to reconcile the two competitors. Voltaire himself tried to pacify them in verse, but to no purpose. With some skill, all the same, did he divide his eulogies between them in the following madrigal:—

“Ah ! Camargo, que vous êtes brillante !  
Mais que Sallé, grands dieux ! est ravissante !  
Que vos pas sont légers, et que les siens sont doux !  
Elle est inimitable et vous êtes nouvelle.  
Les Nymphes sautent comme vous,  
Et les Grâces dansent comme elle.”

To “leap like the Nymphs,” however, is scarcely so romantic as to “dance like the Graces;” and

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